Case Study Analysis: Union Carbide Corporation And Bhopal Essay, Research Paper

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A single slip in action may cause lasting sorrow. A slight mistake in operation at a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal of India causes a lot of deaths and injuries. What a tragedy it is. Undoubtedly, there must be something wrong with the management of the plant.

In addition to the plant, the governments related in India that issued permits and provided incentives for the plant, Bhopal community officials who permitted slum dwellers to move near the plant in illegal settlements, Indian environmental and safety inspectors should also be responsible for this. The governments related in India issued permits because people need jobs, or people would starve to death. This was one reason in my opinion. Soft money from Union Carbide plant may be another reason for issuing permits. It was clearly that the governments in America would not issue a permit to Union Carbide plant under such circumstances, which lacked of severe environmental standards and permitted slum dwellers to live near the plant and so on. Such actions were the fuses leading to more deaths. Before the major gas leakage from the MCI unit on December 3, 1984, some people were killed because of phosgene gas leakage. However, no one took it seriously in spite of the report by media. One of the reasons that people ignore this was because people didn¡¦t know the potential danger of the chemical plant. The other reason was that there are not enough environmental inspectors to cover so many plants in India. Besides, those inspectors had a record of loose enforcement. Consequently, danger emerged just as the saying goes ¡§Nothing comes of nothing.¡¨

As for the management of Union Carbide¡¦s Bhopal plant, some steps indeed needed to be improved. Let us take a look at the whole process of the gas leak and see what actions can be improved. The first mistake in my opinion was that R. Khan, an operator in the MIC complex, neglected to insert a slip blind above the point of water entry. This omission violated instructions in the MIC processing manual, the technical manual that set forth procedures established by the chemical engineers who set up the plant. Obviously, the plant failed to emphasize the importance of obeying the processing manual and the danger of disobeying that. It is very important to follow step-by-step action under such a dangerous working condition. Then, a new operator noticed there was something wrong with tank 610, but was unconcerned because the gauges were often wrong. That was really amazing to me. There is no difference whether the plant had the gauges or not in this way. Unfortunately, the refrigeration units that cooled the tanks had been shut down for five months as an economy measure. Nevertheless, every instrument has its own use. It is not allowed to ignore any one part of a machine. When the operator informed his supervisor, the supervisor suggested fixing leak after a tea break for about twenty five minutes. It is so unbelievable that a supervisor would not respond to his subordinate immediately. The situation may become totally different if the supervisor can take immediate action to that situation at that time since a supervisor may have more knowledge or experience to control the whole situation. It never rains but it pours. The scrubber, which was designed to handle the temperature and pressure, and a flare tower, designed to burn off toxic gases before the gas escaped into the atmosphere were either down for maintenance or off-line. At the same time, the plant violated another procedure in the MIC processing manual, which called for leaving one tank empty as safety measure. When the plant superintendent arrived in the control room, gas leak was out of control already. I think that it could be a turning point at that time only if the plant superintendent could also thought of how to rescue the slum dwellers nearby the plant. He forgot to use the buses owned by their own plant to evacuate those residents. He also forgot to use broadcast to inform those residents to breathe through a wet cloth because MIC was so reactive with water. Thus, tragedy occurred. We can see there was so much poor management and operation needed to be changed in the Union Carbide¡¦s Bhopal plant.

As a result, the following came a lot of lawsuits, demanding compensation, and investigations, investigating the cause of the MIC leak, against the plant. During the investigations, both the government of India and the interior of the Union Carbide did research on that incident. We are not surprised at their different answers because the plant wanted to cover the truth that was harmful to themselves and the government as a result could not get the truth on the other hand. However, I can¡¦t deny that the plant really did something such as relief fund, training school, and so on to prove that they really wanted to compensate for that gas leak. In this case, I don¡¦t think that the CEO of Union Carbide should be arrested or be sentenced. But I do think he should be responsible for the whole case. In other words, he should resign for the whole incident.

Generally speaking, the legal system didn¡¦t play a very active role in this case. First of all, the India government could do more on digging the truth of the gas leak out and set a more strict standard to regulate such dangerous plants in case that another crisis. Second, I didn¡¦t see any one who worked in the Union Carbide¡¦s Bhopal plant should be responsible for that tragedy. Does it mean that all that the India court wanted was money or it just wanted to reduce trial and subsequent appeals because it might have taken more than twenty years?

To sum up, Union Carbide handled the crisis cleverly but not well enough because it knew what would the India government and court react to this incident. Union Carbide controlled the whole situation and took lead of the lawsuits itself. The India government and court didn¡¦t help those victims as much as they needed instead. The function of government, designed to protect its people, disappeared in this case.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

¡§Union Carbide Corporation And Bhopal,¡¨ in Steiner and Steiner, pp.147-161.