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Conoco Chemicals Company
Conoco Inc.
P. O. Box 91, New Highway 25
Aberdeen, Mississippi 39730
(601) 369-8111

December 22, 1983

Mr. Jerry B. Banks, P.E.
Mississippi Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Pollution Control
P. O. Box 10385
Jackson, MS 39204

Dear Mr. Banks:

At 11:55 a.m. on December 18, 1983, I reported a release of vinyl chloride to the National Response Center. This letter is to provide you with information concerning the release.

At about 5:30 a.m. that morning the control panel operator was in the process of charging D-600 reactor. The reactor had been evacuated normally and the panel operator attempted to break vacuum by momentarily opening the VCM charge valves which is the normal procedure. The operator did not get an open indication on one of the two VCM charge valves and he did not think any VCM vapor had entered the reactor. Field personnel inspected the valve and found water in the solenoid for this valve. It was decided to try to reinitiate the charge procedure in an effort to open the valve. The control panel operator, who did not think there was VCM in the reactor, opened the reactor vent valve, the main dump valve and the sewer dump valve to assure no water had collected in the reactor during the twenty-minute period since his first attempt to break vacuum. He wanted to insure that the reactor charge was not initiated with a partially filled reactor.

Shortly after the operator opened the valves, the fixed point monitor detected VCM in the area and soon after that the deluge system activated. The operator then closed the valves on the reactor. Before opening the valves, the panel operator glanced at the pressure chart for the reactor and thought no pressure was indicated on the chart. That, plus he did not get an indication the VCM valve ever did open, made him believe there was no VCM pressure in the reactor when he opened the vent and dump valves.

After the release, the chart for the reactor was checked and in fact did show the pressure to be 8 psig before the operator vented it. Even though the operator did have a problem with the VCM charge valve, the release could have been avoided if he had closely checked his pressure chart and determined there was pressure on the reactor. The release resulted due to operator error. He did not check his reactor pressure strip chart to assure there was no pressure on the reactor. The amount of the release, 229 pounds, was calculated based on the reactor venting VCM vapors from 8 psig to atmospheric pressure.

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CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Jerry Banks, P.E.
12/22/83
Page 2

An instrument man was called to the plant after the incident and the solenoid for the VCM charge valve was repaired.

All panel operators have been reinstructed that before venting a supposedly empty reactor, they should carefully check the pressure strip chart indication to assure there is no pressure on the reactor before the vent valves are opened.

Sincerely,



R. A. Frohreich
Chief Process Engineer
Aberdeen Chemical Plant

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bcc: JF, CRM, VEM, DLM, JCL