

Australian Professor Andrew Hopkins nominated to U.S. Presidential Commission on Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

The recent Gulf of Mexico oil spill is considered to be the worst environmental disaster in history, killing 11 persons and causing immeasurable ecological damage. U.S. President Barack Obama, blaming the incident on "a breakdown of responsibility" at energy giant BP, has created an independent commission to investigate the disaster. Professor Andrew Hopkins of the Australian National University has been nominated to be part of this commission - the only non-American to be nominated.

Professor Hopkins' nomination is due to his extensive expertise in the field of industrial safety and accident analysis. He was consultant to the U.S. Chemical Board investigation of the 2005 BP Texas City explosion. He subsequently authored the international best-seller, "Failure to Learn: the BP Texas City Refinery Disaster" – a book that discusses the causes of the accident which killed 15 people and injured more than 170 others.

He was recipient of the 2008 European Process Safety Centre prize for extraordinary contribution to process safety in Europe - the first time the prize was awarded to someone outside of Europe. He was also Expert Witness at the Royal Commission into the Longford Gas Plant fire in 1998. He is Consultant to the Australian Defence Forces on organisational culture.

In the words of Professor Kim Beazley, Australian Ambassador to Washington:

"Professor Hopkins is a major national asset. His work on the causes of disastrous accidents has made him internationally known – an element of our national capacity to intellectually 'punch above our weight.' "

Jordan Barab, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Occupational Safety and Health, speaking on 'Oil Industry Safety' at the "National Safety Conference" in San Antonio, Texas, on May 19th this year, said:

"To paraphrase Professor Andrew Hopkins (whose work "Failure to Learn: the BP Texas City Disaster" you should all be reading), workplace culture is not just an educational program that gets everyone to be

more risk aware and think "safety first." Hopkins and the Center for Chemical Process Safety have defined culture simply as "the way we do things around here." The conference was organised by the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association.

Speaking to Journalist and Author John McQuaid for a recent article in Globe.net online magazine, Professor Hopkins said that the BP disaster had several possible insights for the Gulf oil spill: one was that BP and other corporations sometimes marginalise their health, safety, and environmental departments.

"The crucial voice for safety in Texas City was shielded from the site manager, and the very senior agency people in the BP corporate head office in London had no role in ensuring safety at the site level," he said. "The organisational structures disempowered the voices for safety and I think you've got the same thing here (in the Gulf spill)".

He added that the failure to put risks into perspective, and treating safety and environmental compliance issues simply as daily metrics was the second mistake made by organisations:

"These things we are talking about are risks that won't show up this year, next year - it may be 10 years down the road before you see one of these big blowouts or refinery accidents," he said. "This same thing happened in the global financial crisis. Bankers were paid big bonuses for risks taken this year or next year, but the real risks came home to roost years later."

Professor Hopkins has authored numerous books and featured in several OHS training DVDs. He also conducts presentations and provides consultation services worldwide to clients from various industries, helping them improve and develop their systems of prevention. For more information on Professor Hopkins, please visit his website at: <http://www.professorandrewhopkins.com/>

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