

PR OSHA Issues Significant Penalties Following Workers' Fatality and Other Severe Injuries that Occurred at San Juan Power Plant

Fifty violations were issued by PR OSHA totaling penalties of \$359,000.00. The case is currently being contested.

Last summer the Puerto Rico Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (PR OSHA) responded to an accident at the San Juan Power Plant from the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA). In this accident one worker died and two other workers were seriously injured when a hydrogen explosion occurred while performing a gassing and de-gassing process on the turbine on one of the boilers in the power plant.

PR OSHA personnel were present two hours after the explosion and during the extraction of the worker that died at the scene. The investigation started the same day of the event.

The Assistant Secretary of PR SOHA, Jose I. Droz, held a meeting with the Bureau of Inspection Management for the purpose of identifying the best PR OSHA resources available to assist in the investigation for the incident.

The first step Assistant Secretary Droz took was to send a letter to the President of PREPA requesting all gassing processes cease until PR OSHA had observed and analyzed the tasks and procedures implemented by PREPA. This took many hours of studying the schematics, process flow charts, instructions, and procedures for the turbines and the processes.

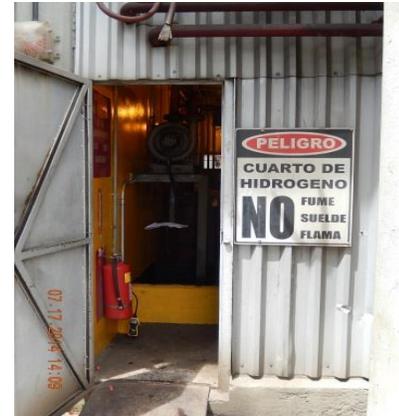
During the first two weeks, PR OSHA personnel were present at the plant verifying the confined space protocols and process to assure the safety of the workers at the plant. After that period PR OSHA sent a request to PREPA to be present in any gassing and de-gassing processes at the PREPA plant for the purpose of verifying that the process was done correctly and it was safe for the workers performing them. This was done for a three-month period.



After evaluation of those procedures by our team, PR OSHA requested that PREPA provide re-training on de-gassing and confined space for all the workers who perform these tasks before they were sent to do gassing procedures.

PR OSHA held a meeting with PREPA management and union representatives to assure that the procedures and trainings given to the workers complied with the regulations and that they were working in a safe environment while performing the same procedures that had resulted in the San Juan Power Plant explosion.

PR OSHA's role in this inspection went beyond that of an investigation, because they took an active role in providing guidance, identifying situations found to be hazardous, and making recommendations for possible solutions to problems observed during the inspections. This approach was taken with the intention of eliminating and/or controlling hazardous conditions, since shutting down the plant was not an option.



Assistant Secretary Droz announced there is clear evidence that injuries were caused by the unsafe conditions created by the PREPA. PR OSHA cited PREPA with three willful, 43 serious, and four other safety violations.

All documentation requests and interviews were handled through PR OSHA's legal division which was extremely time-consuming, but they wanted assurance that all declarations were signed under oath.

The inspection was very complicated and time-consuming due to all the documentation and the processes that the CSHOs had to review, as well as having the Salt Lake City Lab examine the components involved in the accident.

This was the first case where PR OSHA involved all of its available resources – the Bureau of Inspections, Technical Assistance, and the Legal Office. PR OSHA believes that this case will set precedence on how future fatal and catastrophic incidents are investigated.

