

Looking Ahead at the First Ever International Process Safety Week

Evan Pfab • CEP

International Process Safety Week (IPSW) will take place Dec. 2–6, 2024. This virtual event is a joint effort between the Center for Chemical Process Safety (CCPS), IChemE Safety Centre (IChemESC), Mary Kay O’Connor Process Safety Center (MKOPSC), Fire and Blast Information Group (FABIG), and the European Process Safety Centre (EPSC). IPSW will, in part, commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal tragedy, considered the world’s worst industrial disaster.

CEP sat down with Shakeel Kadri, Executive Director and CEO of CCPS, to hear more about this inaugural event.

International Process Safety Week in December 2024 will be the first of its kind. Where did the idea come from?

Kadri: Frankly, the process safety community has talked about the idea of having such a day or week for many years. The community always felt that such an event would improve awareness of process safety. However, no serious effort was put forward by the community in the past. Having said that, I’m aware of many companies who have put forward a process safety day or a process safety week in their own company. And that would be either to commemorate one of their own significant incidents or an incident from industry. The objective is really to raise a constant awareness of process safety.

Personally, I have been invited to a couple of those company events, where people have asked me to come and talk about major incidents and lessons learned. So, I’ve been aware of the need for events like this. But let me share with you how we really created this particular event (IPSW).

In the summer of 2022, I received an inquiry from Peter Hereña, a process safety manager from CF Industries. CF Industries is a CCPS member. He asked if we had ever had a process safety week before or were thinking about having one. And my answer was fairly short: “No, we haven’t.”

The idea of having IPSW had also been on my mind because the 40th anniversary of Bhopal was coming up. I thought that we could really take advantage of this pivotal event to remind everyone about what had happened, and use that as a starting point or springboard. We may not focus on Bhopal in the future process safety weeks, but we will at least start with the Bhopal incident and then kind of pivot around other major incidents in the future. That was really the intention, so I took this idea to some of my good industry

friends around the world who have similar organizations like CCPS. And the response was very encouraging. So, we said, “Let’s start it.”

What will IPSW mean for the profession?

Kadri: The intent of having such a week or such a day is to remind us of the importance of process safety and what happens when process safety is not managed correctly. Major incidents do not happen in all companies — so they may not maintain a sense of vulnerability. Bhopal and events like IPSW can refocus stakeholders on process safety attention, increase their sense of vulnerability, and provide impetus to commit to learning and sharing to focus on achieving “A World Without Process Safety Incidents.”

As you mentioned, IPSW will coincide with a major anniversary of the Bhopal disaster. How have things changed since then?

Kadri: I can probably go on for quite a bit on this question, but let me focus some of my thoughts. It has been almost 39 years now since the world’s worst industrial accident happened, which was a result of a toxic release from a facility in Madhya Pradesh, India. The incident killed thousands and injured many more. The Bhopal incident catalyzed improvements in process safety, stewardship, and practices worldwide. It significantly sensitized regulatory agencies around the world and encouraged the enactment of new process safety management regulations. It also created more acceptance by companies to implement process safety management voluntarily rather than by regulation.

We have seen good improvement in the education process. A lot more universities and organizations are focusing on teaching students process safety in their undergraduate programs. There is also more acceptance of a management system-type approach, and a significant push to think about process safety culture and process safety leadership.

Several organizations were founded following the Bhopal incident. CCPS is one of those organizations, started in March of 1985, and the intent was to really create best practices for the industry so that people learn from incidents like Bhopal and prevent similar ones from occurring. Industry has made significant improvements in process safety awareness, leadership engagement through a broad process system approach, and overall process safety culture.

Then there is the public side, which has also been my

focus. There was a significant outcry from the public when this happened. Bhopal raised awareness of the consequences of such incidents, and the location of critical facilities has been in question now. Bhopal also raised significant focus on emergency response, because it was one of the things that was really lacking during this incident. A lot of countries are starting to focus on disaster management on a broader level and are making progress in this area.

Having said all that, things are not perfect today. We are still seeing significant incidents occurring around the world, and we have really been focusing on improving hazard awareness. We are also helping to make sure that people consider process safety a business value. What I believe is that unless we develop inherently safer technologies to really eliminate hazards from processes, we'll still have this issue. We need to share more and learn more, because we are still seeing repeated incidents in the chemical process industries.

Bhopal catalyzed the formation of many organizations. Which organizations are involved with IPSW?

Kadri: When the idea for IPSW originated, I engaged several organizations that I work with routinely and formed a steering committee. The steering committee includes leaders from CCPS, IChemESC, MKOPSC, the EPSC, and FABIG. I'm very thankful to those organizations for their participation.

Our intent is to get many organizations around the world involved, including those in industry, regulatory, and academia, as well as individual companies.

What will the programming look like and who will have access to it?

Kadri: One thing we agreed to upfront was that this has to be free of charge. And we want it to be available to as many people as possible, so we agreed it will be a virtual event. It's going to be fully complimentary. Those who are interested in joining can register through AIChE or the international process safety email.

In terms of how we are going to do this, each organization from the steering committee will take one day of that week. For example, if CCPS is running the first day of the week, we will be doing programming for about eight hours that day. That programming will include some pre-recorded keynotes, learnings from incidents, webinars, live feeds, and so forth. Again, it will be mostly technical in nature.

Then, we will offer that eight hours of content for the remaining 16 hours of the day so that other regions can view it, and we will have it available for future access.

What programs specifically will CCPS host at IPSW?

Kadri: CCPS is considered, I would say, the largest process-safety-oriented organization with the most corporate members who are helping to create best practices around the world. The steering committee is still in discussion about what each organization will host and how. However, my current thoughts are that CCPS will deliver pre-recorded leadership messages. We will be selecting some support organizations, like the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB), to share lessons learned. We will also share process safety webinars; as you know, the AIChE Academy has many process safety training activities. We'll select some of those and perhaps share a live feed of any CCPS conference at that time.

Even though we are still a year out, how can potential supporters or experts get involved?

Kadri: We are looking for help from support organizations. Each steering committee member has identified support organizations in their purview and we are sending invites to those organizations. As we speak right now, we are continuing to see a lot of progress in that area.

Another way to get involved is to spread the word about the event to others who might benefit — and to register for the event once registration opens next year. *CEP* goes to many, many people around the world, so I am hoping that this article will begin to spearhead awareness for IPSW. Those interested should register through AIChE or the international process safety email.

Will IPSW be an annual event?

Kadri: As I mentioned earlier, we want to springboard this event using the 40th anniversary of Bhopal to commemorate the major work that industry has done since the disaster. But we are not going to stop there. That's not the only incident that has happened; there are many other incidents and we want to continue this on a yearly basis. We are already looking at some of our supporters and founding members who can help sponsor this event for the next six years. We may also have some regular members who want to support it.

All the organizations that are involved in this are not-for-profit organizations. Early on, we decided that we are

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not going to go to our members for membership dues to support IPSW. We are going to ask for new funding and make it self-sufficient.

Any final comments?

Kadri: My final thought. I'm very excited that we have five leading process safety organizations in the world, for the first time in history, collaborating on a very important cause. This is a true responsible collaboration because everyone

will benefit. We all believe that process safety needs relentless vigilance. We strongly believe that IPSW will raise this needed vigilance and remind us not to repeat all those past significant preventable incidents, including Bhopal, where thousands needlessly lost their lives.

To make IPSW effective in 2024 and beyond, we would like all stakeholders around the world to join in on this journey and passionately commit to learn, share, and help to achieve "A World Without Process Safety Incidents." **CEP**

INTERNATIONAL PROCESS SAFETY WEEK STEERING COMMITTEE



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