UHM FINED $115,500 FOR SAFETY VIOLATIONS

The Hawaii Occupational Safety & Health Division (HIOSH) issued a citation associated with the March 16th laboratory explosion at the Hawaii Natural Energy Institute. A postdoctoral researcher, Ms Thea Ekins-Coward, lost an arm in the explosion. The citation listed 15 “serious” safety violations and a fine of more than $115,000*. UHM is required to correct the violations by October 21st.

A list of the violations is on the following page.

*HIOSH later reduced the fines to $69,300 and the number of violations to nine in response to UHM’s prompt actions taken after the blast. (http://www.staradvertiser.com/2016/10/07/breaking-news/state-agrees-to-reduced-violations-fines-in-uh-lab-explosion/)
UHM’s safety violations identified by HIOSH

1. The employer failed to provide a safe workplace by reducing employee exposure to potential explosion and fire hazards.
2. The employer did not ensure that its safety practices were followed by employees and underscored through training, positive reinforcement, and a clearly defined and communicated disciplinary system.
3. The employer did not ensure periodic in-house inspections were being performed in Hawaii Natural Energy Institute laboratories to determine new or previously missed hazards.
4. Laboratory personnel working under the principal investigator did not use the required personal protective equipment at all times.
5. Two exit routes were not available in the laboratory to permit prompt evacuation of employees and building occupants.
6. The exit door did not swing out in the direction of exit travel.
7. The employer’s emergency action plan(s) did not list the evacuation meeting point nor a way to account for the evacuees.
8. The employer did not review the emergency action plan when employees were initially assigned.
9. A fire prevention plan did not include specific provisions to address potential ignition sources in the presence of hydrogen and other flammable gases.
10. Activities performed in the laboratory by researchers with the potential exposure to explosion and fire hazards were not assessed for appropriate personal protective equipment.
11. Activities performed in the laboratory by researchers with the potential exposure to explosion and fire hazards were not assessed for appropriate glove protection to guard against static discharge and flame-retardant laboratory coats to guard against fire.
12. Where hazardous chemicals were used in the workplace, the employer did not carry out the provisions of a written Chemical Hygiene Plan, which were capable of protecting employees from health hazards associated with hazardous chemicals in that laboratory.
13. The employer’s Chemical Hygiene Plan did not include the standard operating procedures relevant to safety and health considerations to be followed when laboratory work involved the use of hazardous chemicals.
14. The employer’s Chemical Hygiene Plan did not include criteria to determine and implement controls relevant to the gas mixing operation (engineering controls, personal protective equipment, administrative).
15. The employer failed to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the Chemical Hygiene Plan at least annually and update it as necessary.

Source: Chemical & Engineering News