

## ***SPECIAL FEATURE SECTION: SAFETY OF CHEMICAL PROCESSES***

### ***Editorial***

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#### **Safety Feature**

This is the third annual feature devoted to safety studies, and I hope that this will now continue each year in the November/December issue of the journal. Once again I am indebted to David am Ende of Pfizer and Paul Vogt of Albany Molecular for preparing some interesting highlights, and to the authors who submitted papers in this issue.

One of the aims of this safety feature is to make chemists and chemical engineers aware of potential hazards, particularly with the scale-up of processes. In my travels, I hear rumours of runaway reactions or explosions at certain companies, but it is rare that we see reports in the literature of what happened. For example, I heard a rumour of an explosion in the manufacture of 1-hydroxybenzotriazole (HOBt) in the United States in the last few months, but a Google search failed to find any real details, except for the number of injuries. I hope that the full investigation will be published, if only to prevent others making the same mistake. HOBt usually exists as the hydrate, and it may be that dehydration leads to instability. It is such a popular reagent that it would be useful to know why there was a problem in its manufacture.

Unfortunately, companies are tending to keep secret the results of investigations into incidents, whereas they should be published for the good of the chemical community. There is nothing more frustrating than seeing accidents occurring repeatedly. When I was involved with a runaway incident with sodium hydride and DMF at SmithKline and French in the early 1980s and the results were published in *Chem. Eng. News*, I received several letters saying that others had had the same runaway. If they had published their results, we would have been made aware of the dangers and probably would have used an alternative procedure.

Can I therefore encourage all readers to persuade their companies to release information on all runaway reactions and explosions and on potential runaways, detected as a result of diligent safety studies? In the United States, incidents investigated by government organisations are published on websites, and this is a useful source of information. In the United Kingdom, the Health and Safety Executive investigate, but regard the results as confidential and rarely publish the results—this is wrong, in my view. The HSE by publishing the data would prevent accidents occurring, and surely this is the ideal situation.

If a detailed full paper cannot be published, please send a Letter to the Editor or a Communication to the Editor outlining what happened, even if the causes are not clear. This will alert our readers of potential hazards. Forewarned is forearmed!

Trevor Laird

*Editor*

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