

Trump plans to shut down the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board

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President Trump is planning to kill the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB), allocating \$0 for its 2026 budget. The CSB is an independent federal agency whose function is to “conduct root cause investigations of chemical accidents at fixed industrial facilities,” as the agency explains on its website.

The agency’s budget last fiscal year was \$14.4 million, less than one percent of the \$2.1 billion that a single B2, the plane used to bomb Iran, costs. Its emergency fund of \$844,000 would be used for closure-related costs.

The CSB has always had limited regulatory powers. It has no ability to penalize companies or issue regulations, and its reports have a standard disclaimer that even prevent its usage in lawsuits.

In spite of this and its small size, having only 50 employees, the agency has had a significant impact on occupational safety and has undoubtedly saved lives.

The CSB has published a number of important investigations into fatal accidents at workplaces and provided recommendations to industry, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), unions and other bodies. Created by the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and first funded and operating in 1998, the tiny agency investigated nearly 180 major chemical incidents. These incidents resulted in over 200 fatalities and 1,300 serious injuries and billions of dollars in damage to property and the environment. All of these, as the agency points out, were preventable.

A five-minute video posted to the CSB’s YouTube channel (viewable [here](#)) succinctly covered its importance in preventing accidents. The video, which has 83,000 views, has almost 1,200 comments which are overwhelmingly outraged at Trump’s plans to destroy the agency. Comments from abroad opposed destroying the CSB as well, including from France, the UK, New Zealand and elsewhere. CSB recommendations are incorporated into safety practices around the world, and its destruction would have ripple effects for workplace safety well outside the US.

The Trump administration argues that the CSB duplicates

capabilities of other agencies to produce “unprompted studies” of the chemical industry. This characterization is false on its face, as the “studies” in question are in fact investigations “prompted” by deadly and preventable accidents. In the United States, hazardous chemical accidents happen every other day according to the nonprofit Coming Clean.

Furthermore, Trump’s justification is a “lie,” Jordan Barab, a former deputy assistant secretary of OSHA and a former CSB recommendations manager told *Grist*. Barab explained that OSHA and the EPA are limited to assessing violations of existing standards and regulations, while CSB can investigate “deeper causes” of accidents including worker fatigue, corporate budget cuts and lax oversight.

The immediate effect of ending the CSB will be the cessation of the investigation into the multiple explosions at the Dow Chemical Louisiana complex in 2023 in Plaquemine. The explosions were felt for miles and released over 31,000 pounds (14,000 kilograms) of ethylene oxide, a known carcinogen, into the atmosphere. The plant is located in “Cancer Alley,” an industrial corridor with significantly elevated cancer rates in Louisiana.

The highest number of the investigations took place in Texas, with 22 cases, followed by Louisiana. Texas has its own cancer clusters around regions with a high density of petrol-chemical plants, including East Harris County, in Houston, and the Port Arthur-Beaumont region. Another effect of ending the CSB would be ending its investigations of chemical releases, which both states are notorious for and which lead to increases in cancer and other diseases.

“Closing the CSB will mean more accidents at chemical plants, more explosions and more deaths,” said Beth Rosenberg, a public health expert who served on the CSB board from 2013 to 2014.

As was previously pointed out, all the accidents the CSB examined were preventable and using the most advanced science available it produces reports showing why. Following are two representative examples:

BP-Husky Toledo Refinery Fatal Naphtha Release and Fire

On September 20, 2022, a naphtha release and fire at the BP-Husky Toledo Refinery fatally injured two employees, who were brothers, Ben Morrissey and Max Morrissey. The incident occurred in Oregon, Ohio, at 6:46 p.m. when a vapor cloud ignited causing a flash fire. The fire, which was the immediate cause of the fatalities, resulted from the release of flammable liquid naphtha, a petroleum distillate, from a pressurized vessel to the ground.

The report found a number of deficiencies in the safety procedures at the plant, which if fixed could prevent future disasters. These deficiencies include:

- No procedures existed for dealing with a high amount of flammable liquid in the vessel.
- “Alarm Flood,” with alarms constantly going off for an average of 10 alarms in 10 minutes on average, more “than a human can effectively respond to” for 12 hours preceding the incident.
- The sheer number of abnormal situations in the 24 hours leading up to the incident overwhelming workers.
- Failure to learn from the BP Texas City Refinery explosion and fire.

The WSWS wrote following the release of the CSB report that it confirmed “the tragedy was result of the subordination of workers’ safety to profit by British Petroleum (BP) management, aided and abetted by state and federal safety agencies and the United Steelworkers bureaucracy,” and that the deaths were “entirely preventable.”

BP Texas City Refinery explosion and fire

One of the worst industrial disasters in recent US history, the March 23, 2005, explosion and fires at BP killed 15 people and injured another 180 leading to financial losses exceeding \$1.5 billion. A CSB investigation was carried out not just of the site’s performance but of BP Group management, based in London. The report stated that:

The Texas City disaster was caused by organizational and safety deficiencies at all levels of the BP Corporation. Warning signs of a possible disaster were present for several years, but company officials did not intervene effectively to prevent it. The extent of the serious safety culture deficiencies

was further revealed when the refinery experienced two additional serious incidents just a few months after the March 2005 disaster... In each incident, community shelter-in-place orders were issued.

Destroying the CSB is bipartisan. The Democrats are doing nothing to stop the gutting of federal safety agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Weather Service, which led to 300 preventable deaths from floods in Texas, and other agencies. Both parties support funneling this money towards a massive build-up of the US military for world war, which now has an over \$1.1 trillion yearly budget, as well as \$3 trillion in handouts to the financial elite.

The other reason the agency is being axed is its factual reporting proves in part that there is an objective basis for an alternative to the industrial slaughterhouse of the American workplace, where approximately 140,000 workers die from traumatic injuries and workplace exposures every year.

This objective reporting helps workers understand these deaths for what they are, not some unavoidable “part of life,” but crimes committed by profit-hungry corporations. Workers are increasingly looking for an alternative to this, and the capitalist system which causes it, and this opposition will take on ever more militant and socialist forms.

This can already be seen in the campaign by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to expose what led to the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams. Adams, 63, was crushed to death by a gantry crane in the Dundee Engine Complex on April 7 in Dundee, Michigan. Since his death, neither the Michigan OSHA, Stellantis nor the United Auto Workers union have released any serious explanation of the causes of his death to his family and co-workers. The IWA-RFC is waging a campaign to expose what happened and on that basis mobilize the working class to stop these deaths.



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