

Trump eliminates funding for federal agency investigating Clairton Coke Works explosion

Funeral held for second steelworker killed in explosion

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Do you work at Clairton Coke Works or another steel mill? Send a report on conditions at the plant by filling out the form below. Submissions will be kept anonymous.

One of the federal agencies charged with investigating the August 11 explosion at the Clairton Coke Works that left two workers dead and ten seriously injured is having its funding completely eliminated by the Trump administration.

The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) was created by Congress in 1998 and tasked with conducting root cause investigations into industrial chemical accidents—particularly at fixed industrial facilities—looking into safety management system failures, equipment failures, human errors and unforeseen chemical reactions.

The CSB conducts investigations throughout the country. The largest number of CSB investigations have focused on the massive petrochemical industry in Louisiana and Texas. In Louisiana, residents refer to the 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River where the industry is concentrated as “Cancer Alley.”

The CSB had arrived in Pittsburgh on Wednesday and begin its investigation into the August 11 explosion and fire at US Steel Clairton Coke works. The powerful blast at the number 13 and 14 coke batteries could be felt for up to 2 miles and sent smoke hundreds of feet into the air.

Killed in the August 11 explosion were 39-year-old Timothy Quinn and 52-year-old Steven Menefee. Ten other workers were seriously injured and taken to local hospitals. Three remain hospitalized with severe burns, and one worker has had multiple amputations.

The Trump administration has completely zeroed out the agency’s budget for the 2026 fiscal year, which begins October 1, or less than two months from now. The administration claims the cuts are justified because the

CSB’s work is being already done by the Environmental Protection Agency. However, the White House is ripping up the work of the EPA as well. Also cut were the entire staff of the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety, which tests and certifies the respirators worn by coal miners, steelworkers, healthcare workers and many others.

“Closing the CSB will mean more accidents at chemical plants, more explosions and more deaths,” said Beth Rosenberg, a former CSB board member and public health expert, in an interview with *Verite*.

No other federal agency offers such in-depth, root-cause investigations of industrial accidents involving chemicals and chemical exposures. It is known for producing video reconstruction featuring sophisticated graphics and expert narration—making its insights broadly usable for safety training and public awareness.

Over its history, the CSB has investigated nearly 180 chemical incidents and issued about 1,000 recommendations.

Some of the major incidents probed by the CSB include:

- The Texas City refinery explosion (2005)
- The Imperial Sugar plant explosion in Port Wentworth, Georgia (2008)
- The BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster (2010)
- The West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion (2013)
- The Richmond, California Chevron refinery fire (2012)
- The Philadelphia Energy Solutions refinery explosion (2019)

But this is only a fraction of the daily serious chemical accidents that occur routinely throughout the United States.

The *Midland Daily News* reports that “Coming Clean, a nonprofit focused on environmental health, the U.S. averaged one serious chemical accident every other day

from 2021 through 2023. These 825 incidents killed 43 people and triggered evacuations in nearly 200 communities.”

Set up in 1998 under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, the agency was never given any real power, with only a \$14 million budget and no authority to issue regulations or impose fines. Implementation of the CSB’s findings and recommendations are only voluntary.

Funeral held for second victim

Killed in the August 11 explosion were 39-year-old Timothy Quinn and 52-year-old Steven Menefee.

Hundreds of workers and community members attending the two viewings held Monday, and the funeral services on Tuesday for Steven Menefee in West Newton, PA, not far from Clairton, where he worked and lived.

Menefee was a devoted husband to Danielle and father to two daughters, Eliana and Ariella.

This was the second funeral held for workers killed in last Monday’s explosion.

Services for Timony Quinn were held on Friday and Saturday. Quinn leaves behind his three children—Jeremiah, Lilliana and Teagan, as well as his mother, Debra Quinn, for whom he was caring, his siblings and his longtime girlfriend, Lucinda Dodds.

Quinn, who worked at the mill for 17 years, was a second-generation steelworker. His father had also worked at Clairton Mill, for 42 years.

The large turnout for both victims reflected the deep sense of loss felt not only by their families and friends but by their coworkers and the broader working class community in the Mon Valley of Pennsylvania.

Neither US Steel nor UPMC have released updates on the three workers still hospitalized. As of late last week, one worker was in a medically-induced coma while healing from severe burns over much of his body. Another worker has had multiple amputations.

History of disasters

Workers at the mill report that a valve in the reversal room for the 13 and 14 batteries had been leaking for two

to four weeks, and that the company did not take action to fix it.

The aging mill has had a series of explosions, accidents and fires, including a 2009 explosion that killed maintenance worker Nick Revetta. The following year a major blast injured 20 workers.

In 2014, a worker died after falling into a trench which was not properly protected.

In 2018, a fire damaged the plant’s pollution control systems, leading to them being offline for three months and triggering a dramatic 4,500 percent spike in sulfur emissions.

Just earlier this year an explosion sent two workers to the hospital.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Alliance of Rank and File Committees are working towards the formation of a workers’ inquiry into this tragedy. This will fully expose both the immediate events that led to Monday’s explosion and the longstanding practices of deliberate neglect that have put the pay of corporate executives and stock dividends ahead of workers’ health and safety.

The lives lost and the families shattered must not be swept under the rug through endless investigations and token fines! To uncover the truth and hold those responsible to account, workers themselves must take the initiative.

An independent rank-and-file investigation into the Clairton disaster, led by steelworkers and supported by workers throughout the region, is necessary. Only such a workers’ inquiry can expose the full extent of management’s negligence and the complicity of the union apparatus, and lay the basis for a genuine fight for safe workplaces and the protection of workers’ lives.

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