

# THE DOWNSIDE OF RISING INTEREST IN PROCESS SAFETY

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

BILL HEATH

Process safety became part of the vernacular of the energy business with the release of the Baker Report in 2007, following an explosion at the Texas City refinery that killed 15 people and injured 170. The report noted that BP, which owned the refinery at the time, had lost the culture of process safety, thinking that a culture that protected an individual from accidents (such as being hit by a falling object) would also stop explosions and leaks. By extension, areas

such as maintenance and good operations, which impact both safety and

operational performance, had been neglected.

A huge amount of good has followed from the Baker Report. In 2013, the number of hydrocarbon releases from platforms off the shores of the United Kingdom reached a record low, according to the British watchdog agency Health and Safety Executive, and the commitment to reducing incidents seems to be more than rhetoric.

However, it has also led to a reduction in responsibility and understanding of operational risk by operations staff, and with this a fall in the ability of operations departments to manage themselves effectively. In other words, operational risk has come to mean process safety and has been separated from operational performance as a whole, with the former managed by safety professionals and the latter by operational professionals.

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