

Re: Warning Devices at Oil Refineries

Council on March 14, 1974 requested a report on the feasibility of having some type of warning device installed at oil refinery locations to alert nearby residents of dangers that might require an evacuation of the areas involved.

The Fire Chief has studied the proposal and advises as follows:

"Shell Refinery has an agreement to notify the schools in the immediate area and sound a siren within the plant. This siren is sounded in test (a short blast once a week at 12 o'clock noon to determine if it is operational), and at anytime a fire is reported within the Refinery.

As for practicability of having a warning system to alert nearby residents that an emergency is in progress requiring evacuation, I feel many of the residents in the area would know a fire of serious consequences by the amount of fire apparatus and police vehicles in the area sounding sirens.

The police vehicles with loud hailer equipment could warn people in a more positive manner than any signal from within the plant itself. The police have authority to tell the people to move out whereas it is questionable if residents would evacuate if left to individual choice.

If an electronic signal was used to warn residents from within the plant itself, it would have to be controlled so that it could not be set off either accidentally, intentionally by vandals or by mechanical failure, thereby panicking the nearby residents.

On occasions in the past, people have been requested to evacuate an area because of possible explosion and we find the public apathy to such instructions is that they refused to move even across the street until the police threatened to arrest if they failed to move.

I wonder if a signal was sounded to indicate an evacuation of the area was necessary, how many would in fact evacuate? Also, would driving under these stressed and strained conditions cause greater problems.

My thoughts on this subject is that no signal be given from within the Refinery and the police be asked to use their authority to evacuate the necessary area involved. The authority for this decision would come from the Officer in Charge of the fire fighting within the plant."

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT special warning devices not be installed at oil refinery locations for the reasons noted in this report.