Dodging Disaster: Sorrento Lactalis

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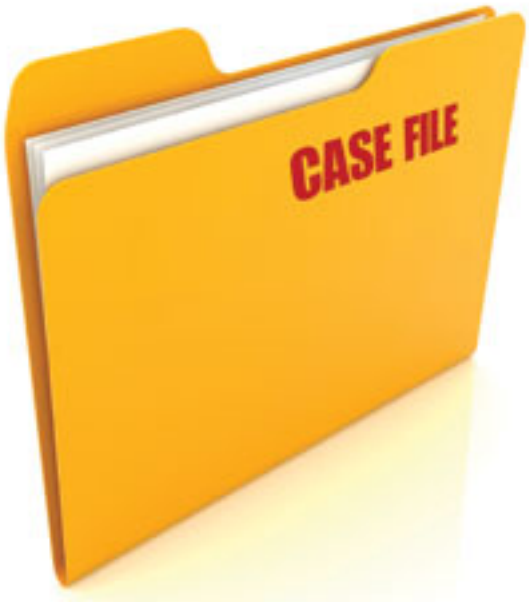
This article first appeared in March 2013's "iPurchase: Safety First ***[1]***"



***Chem.Info*'s recurring Dodging Disasters feature details the missteps and safety oversights that led to a recent plant disaster and provides actionable information to help processors avoid the same mistakes. Today we take a look at a recent incident at Sorrento Lactalis.**

Sorrento Lactalis, Inc.
Buffalo, N.Y.
OSHA Citation Date: May 23, 2012
OSHA Fine: $241,000.00

An inspection by the Buffalo, N.Y. office of OSHA on October 25, 2011 uncovered 13 of what the administration called “repeat and serious hazards” to plant and worker safety at the city’s Sorrento Lactalis cheese production facility. Most of these hazards revolved around the company’s safety protocol surrounding large quantities of hazardous chemicals, specifically the anhydrous ammonia used in the company’s refrigeration system. OSHA’s complaints against the company also included alleged violations regarding:

- incomplete procedure documentation.
- unsecured electrical cable.
- lack of “lockout/tagout” procedures.
- lack of hazardous energy control procedures.
- insecure cable to conveyor motor.

“The stringent and comprehensive requirements of OSHA’s PSM standard are designed to prevent a catastrophic incident, such as the uncontrolled release of highly hazardous chemicals, by having employers effectively evaluate, anticipate, address, and prevent hazardous conditions associated with processes utilizing those chemicals,” said Arthur Dube, OSHA’s area director for western New York, in a press release published by the administration. “Full and effective adherence to the standard’s requirements is critical to guarding the safety and health of employees.”

If OSHA’s allegations prove true, Sorrento Lactalis could have benefited from better documentation procedures, clarifying company protocol for dealing with anhydrous ammonia and communicating that protocol to employees. OSHA claims another Sorrento Lactalis facility in Nampa, Idaho was cited twice — in 2008 and 2011 — for similar violations, upgrading the 2012 citations against the company’s Buffalo facility to “repeat violation.”

In the wake of OSHA’s report, the company released a statement that read in part:

“In response to citations issued by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Sorrento Lactalis wishes to emphasize its commitment to the safety and well-being of its employees, and to compliance with all federal and state laws in the operation of its business.”

The company is contesting the citations.

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