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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Dingell to Hold Hearings on BP Lessons Learned Following Prudhoe Bay Spill, Field Shut Down, Recent Reports

Washington, D.C. - The Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB), an independent investigative agency, issued a 335-page report today outlining the root causes of an explosion that occurred two years ago at BP's largest oil refinery. Fifteen people were killed and 180 workers were injured in the March 23, 2005, explosion at BP Texas City, which is located just south of Houston.

CSB, which was authorized by the Energy and Commerce Committee under the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, identified several key causes of the accident, including massive cost-cutting by corporate leaders; inadequate corporate oversight; outdated mechanical equipment; and a culture that discouraged the reporting of safety problems. According to the report, repeated budget cuts left the Texas City refinery "vulnerable to a catastrophe."

“The most tragic thing about what happened in Texas City is the fact that this disaster could have been prevented,” said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. “We are committed to making sure BP implements the changes necessary to secure their oil refineries and, more importantly, protect American workers.”

Though previous investigations had been conducted by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), CSB found that OSHA failed to identify the likelihood for a catastrophic accident and take necessary enforcement action, despite obvious warning signs and the fact that 10 fatalities have occurred at the BP Texas City refinery over the past two decades.

Today’s CSB report dovetails with a similar report by the BP U.S. Refineries Independent Safety Review Panel, which is funded by BP in response to a recommendation by CSB and chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker, III. The Baker Panel report, which was released in January, details an apparent complacency towards process safety at all five U.S. refineries operated by BP, not just Texas City.

The Committee on Energy and Commerce intends to hold hearings soon to review BP’s performance and determine whether the company has implemented lessons learned from both the Texas City explosion and last year’s major oil spill at Prudhoe Bay.

“In light of the Texas City blast and the Prudhoe Bay spill, BP’s management must make safety their top priority,” said Dingell. “The millions of dollars in fines that were levied against BP after the explosion have done little more than close the door after the horse had left the stable. It’s clear that both additional oversight measures and sweeping cultural changes are critical.”

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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