

Interview with the EPA (Part 3 of 3)

By Jake Tilley, SCS Tracer Environmental

This is the third and final article in a series of our interview with representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Mary Wesling and Robert Lucas, both of whom have extensive experience with RMP implementation and enforcement.

Q: What are some of the key elements within a facility's RMP documentation that commonly garner attention from EPA inspectors?

A: a. The entire RMP is usually evaluated during an inspection of an ammonia refrigeration facility. The recommendations generated by any of the sections of the RMP, and how the items have been tracked and resolved is always of particular interest. Recommendations are, or should be, generated during implementation of various sections of the RMP, including the Process Hazard Analysis, Compliance Audit, Incident or Near-Miss Investigations, MOCs, etc. If facility records show that NO recommendations have been made for improvement of any of the sections, it would be a red-flag for an inspector.

b. Maintenance or mechanical integrity, both records and visual observation of poor maintenance, is another concern during an inspection.

c. The amount of ammonia at a facility must be clearly established and some facilities may show inconsistent quantities within various sections of their RMP documentation. Facilities must have documentation showing how the inventory calculation was done or show how the quantity of ammonia onsite was determined. An accurate inventory is necessary for a facility to correctly calculate the off-site consequence resulting from the worst case release scenario.

Q: a. How heavily do EPA inspectors weigh industry standards when reviewing written RMP policies, especially for industries like ammonia refrigeration that has published guidelines and standards?

b. Are there justifiable reasons to deviate from those guidelines / standards?

A: a. Recognized and generally accepted good engineering practices (RAGAGEPs) are the standard for compliance which the RMP regulations require. Those RAGAGEPs include industry standards which are based on good engineering standards.

b. Deviations from those standards would only be acceptable if the facility can document that more protective measures are warranted. This type of evaluation would have to be done in collaboration with local, state and federal agencies, and any permitting or licensing authority that is required to assess the design or operational change.

Q: Are there any sources of guidance / outreach that facilities can turn to for staying in compliance with the RMP and/or GDC requirements?

A: EPA's website provides a number of both general and industry-specific guidance documents. It also offers a searchable Q&A which addresses questions posed by subject facilities, as well as links to relevant industry-specific resources. The EPA website is <http://epa.gov/emergencies>. Also, remember that OSHA policies may generally be used to address compliance with parallel EPA RMP sections (see their website).

Q: Any other tips, comments, or notes that you'd like to add regarding RMP issues related to the ammonia refrigeration industry?

A: Remember, when in doubt, contact EPA for information. If you contact EPA for help, your question and compliance with that section of the regulation may then be considered "compliance assistance" as opposed to "enforcement investigation."

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