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UK set to follow United States steps after US Administration issues order to improve oversight of hazardous chemicals.

Recently the White House have issued an executive order to improve safety and security at chemical plants. "The recent devastating Incident such as the explosion at a fertilising plant in Texas back in April is a tragic reminder that the handling and storage of chemicals present serious risks that must be addressed," the statement said.

The executive order directs the government to improve operational coordination across the number of agencies that oversee chemical plant operations and to improve information sharing, modernise policies and work with all the affected parties to develop best practices for the industry.

The Department of Homeland Security, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Labor are directed to establish a Chemical Facility Safety and Security Working Group to improve coordination among federal, state and local agencies, to review the effectiveness of chemical safety programs and to develop regulatory and legislative solutions.

The White House said that while the cause of the explosion of ammonium nitrate stored at the West Chemical and Fertilizer Co. is still under investigation, the government would take "common-sense steps" to improve how federal agencies monitor the safety and security of hazardous chemicals nationwide.

Some lawmakers said a breakdown in communication among the Department of Homeland Security, state agencies, regional emergency planners, West Fertilizer Co. and the town's volunteer fire department kept first responders in the dark about what they were fighting.



One problem has been that there has been no consolidated national database of chemical facilities, a situation which Obama's executive order could rectify. This information could then inform local decisions, from zoning restrictions near such plants to emergency plans for fire departments handling fires at similar facilities.

US Chemical Safety Board Chairman Rafael Moure-Eraso said:



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"The West accident showed a particularly glaring need for comprehensive regulation of reactive chemical hazards and in particular ammonium nitrate. It is my hope that this executive order will spur development of regulation and enforcement for the safe handling of ammonium nitrate and other gaps in the coverage of reactive hazards that the CSB has previously identified to help prevent future incidents.

"I am encouraged that the executive order calls for the revision and strengthening of EPA's Risk Management Program and OSHA's Process Safety Management standard. The CSB has long urged such improvements, specifically that reactive hazards - such as ammonium nitrate - be more comprehensively regulated under RMP and PSM."

Kathy Mathers, a spokeswoman for the Fertilizer Institute, which represents retailers and manufacturers, said: "We support the executive order. Is there duplication among agencies? Are there gaps in regulations? The president's action today is a positive step."

A spokesman from Texas Governor Rick Perry's office said: "The devil will be in the details, so we will see how the different agencies involved attempt to implement the order."

The presidential executive order details are as follows:

Responsibilities of Chemical Facility Safety And Security Working Group

- *Improve coordination between state and local agencies.
- *Enhance federal agency coordination and information sharing.
- *Modernise policies, regulations and standards.
- *Identify best practices to reduce safety and security risks involving potentially hazardous chemicals.

Highlights Of Executive Order Deadlines

45 days

*Establish a pilot program to determine best practices and test innovative methods for federal agency collaboration.

90 days

*Assess feasibility of data-sharing with emergency-response groups.

*Analyse and provide recommendations on improving interagency information collection and sharing.

*Develop options for improved safety and security measures that improve existing risk management practices.

*Create regulatory and legislative proposals to improve the safe and secure storage, handling and sale of ammonium nitrate.

*Identify chemicals that should be added to Chemicals of Interest list.

135 days

*Develop a plan for collaboration by state regulators, emergency responders, facility owners and operators and communities to improve chemical facility safety and security.

180 days

*Propose a data-sharing process to track information on chemical facilities.

*Identify and recommend changes to streamline and improve data collection.

270 days

*Submit status report to the president.

*Create procedures for a unified federal approach for identifying and responding to risks in chemical facilities.

[Read Full Executive Order Here](#)