

Deer Park Community Advisory Council

Deer Park Chemistry Day

March 28, 2022

On Monday night, March 26, 1990, 23 community and plant members of the newly formed Deer Park Community Advisory Council gathered at Shell for the first of what will be **300 meetings** when we meet again next month.

Jimmy Burke was mayor, Lynn Hale the DPISD Superintendent, and Larry Power the publisher of the *Deer Park Broadcaster*. The managers of Shell, Rohm and Haas, Lubrizol, and Occidental Chemical turned to them and others for help establishing a forum where there could be an **open and frank mutual exchange of ideas** between 10 industrial facilities north of SH 225 and people who live, work, or go to school in Deer Park.

Why seek this connection with the community? Though plants supported the community with jobs, taxes, donations, volunteers, and

leadership, **there was no place for routine, face to face communication** about air pollution, health effects, plant accidents, trucks carrying chemicals, and who tells the community when something goes wrong at a plant.

The need for an ongoing dialogue between community and industry grew after the catastrophic 1984 chemical release in Bhopal, India. Government responded by calling for Local Emergency Planning Committees and giving the public the right to know about chemicals in their community. The Chemical Manufacturers Association created CAER and then made a voluntary commitment to seek public input and improve their performance with the 1988 Responsible Care program, which also encourages CACs. In Texas, 200 participants in the Texas Risk Communication Project said plants need to connect with their neighbors on an ongoing basis. Locally, East Harris County Manufacturers Association was formed.

And that takes us to Shell on March 26, 1990. While the CAC was listing issues to discuss at future meetings, there was a very loud steam release, and Norma Hysler asked the first of the hard questions that are raised in DPCAC meetings: “If Shell blows, will the rest of the ship channel fall like dominoes?”

This was the first tough question to be raised, but not the last. The CAC has asked whether emissions cause cancer and whether plants do all they can to prevent accidents when handling large quantities of often volatile chemicals under high pressure. Members critique the adequacy of communications about flaring, noises, and odors. The CAC’s annual report on toxic air releases shows an 88% decrease since 1987. The goal is not just to learn about plants but also to encourage them to improve.

DPCAC has influenced industry to make some specific changes but, most of all, their questions, concerns, and suggestions help plants see

themselves as the community sees them **by giving the general public a face**—or 20 or 30 faces.

Deer Park CAC has built **a true partnership between industry and community for 32 years this month**. I have had the privilege of being the neutral facilitator since that first meeting. Plants make products that benefit society as a whole, but if anything goes wrong, the impacts are felt locally. As long as community and industry are neighbors, they need the constructive dialogue that groups like DPCAC provide.

We meet again April 25 for an update on the BW8 bridge expansion.

Contact us if you would like to attend. Stop by our booth to sign up for meeting notices or go to www.deerparkcac.org.