



OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NETWORK OF INDIA

STYRENE GAS LEAK – WE CONDEMN GROSS MISMANAGEMENT AND CONDOLE WITH THE VICTIMS

OEHNI deeply mourns the death of twelve people and prays for a speedy recovery of thousands exposed to the deadly styrene gas leak from the South Korean owned LG Polymer India Limited. Our heartfelt condolences to the families which have suffered irreparable loss. We condemn the callous attitude of the company and their efforts to. We are shocked at the nonchalant manner with which the Chief Minister of the State, who was quick to give a clean chit to the company and raising concerns and disbelief among the community. Financial compensation, however high they may be cannot bring back the dead nor assuage the deep loss incurred by each of the families.

The factory has a long history of being established as Hindustan Polymers in 1961 and taken over by the UB Group in the late seventies and subsequently from them by LG, post liberalisation, In 1997. The company today employs around 600 people and has a turnover of over 200 Million USD. One would have that given the high standards the South Korean industry was a reason for achieving greater heights their economy in the nineties, the take over by them would have brought about global standards for environmental management and workers welfare. However, as this unfortunate accident has revealed, the company has been very lackadaisical in its operation and failed to do even the basic due-diligence required to restart the operations during the lockdown due to the nCovid-19 pandemic. The company's indifference toward the compliance of the laws of the country is abundantly clear that it has operated for more than two decades without any scrutiny under the environmental legislation. Given the government's own directions of dealing with labour rights and occupational health the company has overlooked even the basic tenets of labour and occupational safety.

The disastrous accident also lays bare the operations of the regulators, who have overlooked the siting guidelines, have been careless with norms and totally compromised in their constitutional role to safeguard the people. We welcome the alacrity with which the National Green Tribunal has reacted to the accident and taken up the issue suo moto. We would like to caution that this should not lead the dilution of the precautionary principles and corporates assume that polluter can resort to paying of for the crimes perpetrated.

We call upon the governments to abandon its mindless pursuit of an ephemeral "ease-of-doing-business" which is proving to be a nightmare for the people and workers. We also record with deep regret the complete failure of the disaster management infrastructure which despite its claims to be having a plan at the local levels has not even been able to map the risks of man-made disaster, leave alone any community-based solutions.

We warn the Boards of LG Polymers in India and Korea that any attempt by the company to circumvent the law and to wriggle out of their responsibilities will only result in the loss of their reputation and severely dent then vast market for its white-goods in the country.

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