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U.S. regulator releases report blaming Freeport LNG blast on inadequate processes

Reuters

November 16, 2022 8:44 AM PST · Updated a year ago



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Smoke billows from the Freeport LNG plant in Quintana, Texas, U.S., June 8, 2022, in this still image obtained from a social media video on June 9, 2022. Courtesy of Maribel Hill/via REUTERS ... [Acquire Licensing Rights](#) [Read more](#)

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Nov 15 (Reuters) - Federal pipeline safety regulators released on Tuesday a heavily redacted consultant's report that blamed inadequate operating and testing procedures, human error and fatigue for the June 8 explosion that shut Freeport LNG's export plant in Texas.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issued the report after Freeport disclosed earlier in the day a summary of the consultant's review. PHMSA said it accepted the redacted report but would later make its own determination on what to exclude.

The fiery explosion at the Texas Gulf Coast plant, the second-largest in the United States, caused global liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices to spike amid falling Russian supplies to Europe and other outages. Neither Freeport's statement on Tuesday nor the consultant's report indicated when the plant could restart.

The PHMSA said its investigation is ongoing.

Causes of the incident were deficiencies in valve testing procedures, failure to adjust alarms that could warn operators of rising temperatures during operations and operating procedures that allowed "operator discretion" to close valves that might cause LNG to be isolated in pipes, the report said.

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It described a control room that did not adequately show when temperatures soared in the pipeline that breached. Other alarms were "constantly indicating" on equipment out of service for years, leading to what some operators described as alarm fatigue.

"Severely damaged" electrical wiring likely ignited the released gas from the pipeline breach and led to fireball, the report said.

Freeport's statement said it has adopted procedural changes including enhanced safety valve testing processes and revised its control systems to alert operators about valve positions or temperature readings.

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In August, Freeport announced plans to restart partial gas processing at the plant by early to mid-November and aimed to reach full capacity by March 2023. As of Monday it had not filed a full repair plan with the PHMSA, which must review and approve the company's plan prior to any restart. Commercial processing likely could not begin until early next year, given the lack of a plan, time needed to review it and approaching U.S. holidays.


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When fully operational, Freeport LNG processes about 2 billion cubic feet per day of natural gas and exports up to 15 million tonnes of LNG per year.

Reporting by Swati Verma and Ruhi Soni in Bengaluru; additional reporting by Gary McWilliams in Houston; Editing by Mark Potter and Christian Schmollinger

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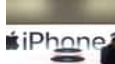
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