* Good evening. My name is Andrew Smith, and I am the CEO of Yenkin-Majestic Paint Corporation. I am here tonight for two reasons. First, I want to share with you what happened on the night of the accident based on what we know. Our company is still grieving, as we lost one employee and others have been injured. We do not yet know everything but I can share what we do know. Second, I want to listen to your concerns. My hope is that all of us can work together in the future.
* Some basic facts may be helpful to understand what we do at our facility. We have many buildings and structures on our site for offices, laboratories, warehousing, maintenance functions, storage, fire safety, and manufacturing. Some of our structures are used to manufacture paint that you will find in retail stores and use in your homes. We also manufacture paint resin, which is an important raw material used in paint; it is a separate operation from paint manufacturing. The accident took place in the building that manufactures paint resin, called the Resin Plant.
* Here is what we know. At approximately 12:05 am on Thursday, April 8 there was a terrible accident at our facility. The Company had 21 people working that night on a shift that started at 7:00 pm. Something went wrong with a batch of paint resin that was being processed in the Resin Plant building. We do not know what caused the problem to happen, but it resulted in flammable vapors being released. Those vapors ignited, causing a blast and a fire. Most of the people were able to evacuate but several people were injured, and tragically one man, Wendell Light, was unable to get out before parts of the building collapsed. Wendell Light died in the accident. He was the supervisor on duty, a 7-year employee of the Company, and we mourn his loss.
* The Columbus Fire Department and the Columbus Police Department were summoned immediately by the Company’s emergency response systems. They arrived on site quickly, as did many Company personnel. The fire suppression system was activated, and sprinklers inside the building operated to help control the fire, as did the heroic efforts of the Columbus Fire Department. The fire stopped burning after about 12 hours. Arriving that morning within a few hours of the accident were officials from the Ohio EPA, and our environmental remediation contractor, who, working alongside Ohio EPA, set up barriers to contain the water being generated to contain the fire.
* I understand how frightening it was to live nearby when this happened, and for that I am so terribly sorry. The blast was powerful and the sound wave shook surrounding buildings. There were broken windows and property damage off our site. Our insurers have reached out to neighboring property owners to compensate for any damage the accident caused, and we have representatives from the insurance company with us here today if for some reason a neighbor was accidentally missed.
* Within a few hours of the accident the Columbus Fire Department had started its investigation. On April 9, the Chemical Safety Board, part of the U.S. EPA, started its joint investigation with OSHA. There are also investigations underway by the insurance companies and the Company itself.
* All of these investigations are still ongoing, and to our knowledge no conclusions have been reached. The Chemical Safety Board has published several updates on its website. The accident site is still tightly controlled by the CSB and OSHA. The excavation of the Resin Plant site has started, and because of the careful safety precautions we are taking, it is a slow process. Within a month we expect to reach the equipment at the center of the accident, and that should be helpful to investigators. Right now there are no answers about how the accident started. We wish we could tell you more, but we do not have any more information than that. All of us want to know how and why this happened.
* There has been some concern expressed about pollution, and we share that concern. The resin plant manufactured paint resin dissolved in paint thinner. These are used in consumer products you would get at a hardware store. Shortly after the accident, air monitoring equipment was installed at the perimeter of our facility. The air monitors were sensitive enough to pick up emissions from passing freight trains, trucks, and automobiles, but I am pleased to report the monitors were negative for emissions coming from the facility. So, immediately after the fire there were no emissions into the surrounding community. During the excavation of the Resin Plant, we are following approved OEPA procedures in case we discover asbestos. So far we have sampled 130 debris piles for asbestos, and all are negative.
* While there was a lot of water generated to contain the fire, most of that water was kept onsite and any contaminated water that was identified was vacuumed up by our environmental contractor and disposed of properly. Some paint resin was released onto the internal concrete roadway next to the resin plant building, and that was cleaned up over a period of a few days following the accident. We are not aware of any paint resin that was released off our site. All required environmental reports have been filed with the proper environmental authorities, and the Ohio EPA has reported that all wastes have been handled properly.
* Once the investigators have access to the equipment in the Resin Plant that was at the center of the accident, they will analyze what they find. Ultimately they will reach conclusions about the cause of the accident, and those conclusions will become public. Our company, and the manufacturing industry, will learn from this accident about how to operate more safely in the future.
* We are currently planning our next steps about how to rebuild. The Resin Plant has not operated since the accident, and we have not made any decisions about repairing or rebuilding it. All of the fire safety systems at our facility have been returned to regular working order. We have resumed our paint manufacturing and distribution operations and continue to hire additional staff for our business. We maintain 24-hour security on our site, which deters criminal activity in the neighborhood, and our monitoring systems have helped the police investigate numerous local crimes over the years.
* Yenkin-Majestic Paint Corporation is a family business in its fourth generation. It was started in 1920 by two recent immigrants, becoming a corporation in 1948, and moving to this site in 1954. We have been part of Columbus as a local family business for over 100 years. We care about this community because we are part of this community. We have approximately 150 employees and an additional 400 members in their households, who are all part of the Yenkin-Majestic family.
* This is a tragic accident, and we are very sorry this happened; we are sorry we have caused you fear and concern; and we are sorry we have impacted our neighborhood. I am here to promise that we will listen to our neighbors. We can never bring back Wendell Light or undo all of the injuries suffered by our colleagues. But we will fix anything we have damaged that can be fixed. We will be transparent and accountable. We will share with you what we know, once we know it. And we will strive to be better neighbors in the future. Thank you.