

**Testimony of Manuel “Manny” Ehrlich
Member of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
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Good Morning, Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings and Members of the Committee.

My name is Manny Ehrlich and I very much appreciate the chance to appear before you today.

It is a distinct honor to have been appointed by the president to the Chemical Safety Board.

I come from a 50-year career in the chemical industry, much of it with BASF, one of the largest chemical manufacturers in the world. I served in a variety of roles, including executive management and eventually leading emergency response efforts at chemical accidents across North America.

My entire career has been devoted to protecting health and safety through prevention and investigation of chemical incidents.

I see my work as a board member of the CSB continuing that path through government service.

This position is especially meaningful to me. I once worked in a plant where two workers lost their lives in a chemical incident, and it was my responsibility to notify their wives. That is not an experience you ever forget.

Only last month the chairman and I visited the DuPont plant in LaPorte, Texas, where we are investigating a toxic gas release that killed four workers. This trip reminded me of the agony associated with the loss of life at a chemical plant, and reaffirmed my commitment to work diligently at the CSB to prevent future accidents.

I firmly believe in the mission of the CSB. It is important work. I can tell you coming from the industry, the investigations of the CSB, their safety videos and the agency itself are held in high regard.

From what I have seen in my time at the agency, productivity is high among CSB investigators and other staff. I was struck by how stressful the work of the investigators can be, but they are focused, they are dedicated.

I am impressed with the consistently high quality of the investigations and recommendations of the reports.

Organizationally, I am aware of the issues this committee has raised concerning management and governance at the agency. Coming from the private sector my approach to organizational effectiveness is built on technical competence and the clear delineation of roles, responsibilities and goals for the organization.

This means clear action plans, measurable objectives and reasonable timelines.

We of course will work with you to make appropriate improvements and to find solutions to any unresolved governance and management challenges.

But I would like to take this opportunity to say that I have a high degree of respect for Chairman Moure-Eraso and the work output of the CSB during his tenure. He has been under heavy fire, but I know him as a man whose entire being is dedicated to preventing these chemical accidents and saving workers' lives.

I know this has been a priority of the chair and certain actions have already been taken to ensure that those activities and programs continue when the chair completes his term in June.

Although I have been at the CSB since only late last year, I have closely followed the work of the Board. While awaiting Senate confirmation, I had much time to study the Board and its operations.

In my judgment, as a former industry executive, a large part of the Board's problems have been due to the confused and ambiguous lines of authority between the Board, career staff, and the Board Chair. In my observation --certainly in the past -- it appears that some Board Members worked with a few career staff to try to curtail the appropriate administrative authority of the Board Chair, so the chain of command within the agency is ambiguous.

Responsibilities that in other federal agencies are under the authority of the head of the agency were presumed not to be at the CSB. It also appears to me that a few career staff dug in on these issues and resisted efforts to ameliorate problems.

I want to emphasize that this was not the attitude of most staff, especially investigators, but it has created conflicts and tensions within the Board, between the Chair and Board, and among staff.

During my time at the agency, I have already witnessed employee actions that would never be found in the private sector. Again, I am speaking of only a few people, but this has had a disproportionately negative effect on the organization.

That is why I put forward a motion in January 2015, to clarify any ambiguities about the Chair's administrative authority. My motion was about the future of the agency, and the authority and leadership capacity of future chairs.

The agency needs to function in a more business-like way, with clearer lines of accountability, responsibility and authority. I believe my motion conforms to private sector practices as well as the practices used at agencies such as the National Transportation Safety Board (upon which the CSB is supposedly modeled) while recognizing there are differences between the government and the private sector. Most importantly, it clarifies an appropriate division of responsibilities between the Board and Chair.

I think it is now time to move forward, not look back. Mr. Engler and I will be working to ensure that the strong labor and environmental coalition background that he brings to the Board, and the industry background that I bring, will be used collaboratively.

We plan to jointly meet with stakeholders such as the United Steelworkers, the American Petroleum Institute, the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the American Chemistry Council, and the Society of Chemical Manufacturers & Affiliates.

The object is to build bridges and obtain acceptance of key CSB safety recommendations that flow from our objective accident investigations. Establishing these relationships can only have a positive impact on furthering the respect that already exists for the CSB and the agency's operating staff.

I look forward to working collegially with Mr. Engler and the other board members to create an organizational culture that is wholly focused on the important mission of the CSB.

I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.