

The Lyons News

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Rice County Fire Chief Ed Feil was thankful for Kansas Ethanol LLC for staging an invaluable training exercise for area firefighters.

By Jim Misunas

Nearly three dozen Rice County firefighters donated their time to showcase a practice burn at Kansas Ethanol, south of Lyons. Nearly all of the people took time off their jobs for the training.

“It was a very successful training,” Feil said. “The guys did a great job working together and we accomplished what we set out to do. We had great teamwork and maintained our safety.”

The firefighters treated the fires with water and various foam substances. The ethanol was mixed with some gasoline to allow viewers and firefighters to see visible flames.

An actual ethanol fire would be invisible. Feil said the demonstration was not nearly as easy as it looked.

“It was strictly for demonstration and personal training,” he said. “We were fortunate to be one of the first departments to be part of training such as this.

Five hundred gallons of ethanol were poured into large pits outside the plant. In the event of an actual ethanol fire or spill, HazMat crews would also have to respond for chemical clean-up.

“Hopefully, this can be an ongoing training for everyone,” said J.L. Ellis, Kansas State Firefighters Association.

It was a first for Kansas Ethanol, but as it grew from the original plan as a training exercise for local volunteer firemen to include a myriad of persons involved in safety management, was recognized as the first in the nation put on by a private company.

The event drew extremely positive feedback from participants, Jennifer Dellar, Kansas Ethanol’s safety director, said after the event, and some thought is being given to making it an annual affair. In the demonstration, large tanks of the firm’s product were ignited, and firefighters practiced extinguishing the fires with different chemicals. ethanol shipped from the plant has a two percent addition of regular gasoline to the ethanol, rendering it unsatisfactory for drinking,

Kansas Ethanol LLC, the year and a half-old ethanol production plant that has emphasized safety from its first day and has been recognized for its safety of no injury or lost time accidents, took safety a leap forward Friday with a training session for approximately 300 persons, representing a myriad of organizations including many emergency management teams, personnel from other ethanol plants, and even a representative of the United States Homeland Security Agency.

The event began as a plan to familiarize local fire departments and other emergency crews on the unique tactics used to fight ethanol fires, but blossomed into one which is now recognized as the first in the country for a private company to give live training for such a diverse number of participants in actual fire situations, and not just

what had commonly been known as “pan training,” which featured fires on an extremely small basis, such as in pans.

Instead, the Friday event was conducted with fires in four 27-foot diameter pits, each containing about 600 gallons of ethanol. Each was ignited, and various forms of firefighting were used in the fire-control demonstrations.

In two instances, the standard type of foam which be would used by Kansas Ethanol and many other such plants, and has been featured in small-scale practices, was ignited and extinguished, but in the other two, demonstrations featured newer fire retardants, which claim to not only put out fires, but to keep the remaining ethanol and surrounding containers cool, so they will not reignite in the smothering foam cover should break and allow oxygen to the fluids.

Jennifer Dellar, who among other titles is the plant’s safety director and who is largely responsible for the Friday event, said that one of the surprising factors to many is the fact that ethanol does not have visible flames when it burns. It could be deceptive to fire fighters, who might inadvertently walk into burning ethanol in their efforts at extinguishment.

The event began at 9 a.m., and continued into the afternoon,. It was a non-public demonstration, and each participant was issued an identification tag upon checking in. A helicopter from the Kansas Highway Patrol filmed the action from the air, while other photographers covered it from the ground for the company and for the media.

Kansas Ethanol has been recognized for not having a single injury or lost-time accident in the more than 16 months of operation, an unusually fine record for a start-up operation. Because of this, it has been accepted in the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Agency) program known as SHARP, which stands for Safety and Health Award Program, more quickly than any other ethanol plant, Ms. Dellar said.

The list of participants is impressive, with those as close as the Lyons Fire Department, and as far away as from Missouri, Ohio, Michigan, and Texas. Fire departments participating included Lyons, Hutchinson, Abilene, Cunningham, Oakley, Grinnell, Clay Center, Great Bend, Emporia, Nickerson, Sterling, Rice County, Bushton, Bonner Springs, McPherson, Independence, Wichita, Windom, Reno County, Geary, Little River, Pratt, Salina, Delphos, Alden, Marquette, Lawrence, Ellinwood, and Sheridan County, all in Kansas; and from Hastings, Neb., and Norman, Texas.

Other participants included, but not limited to, included ethanol plants in Liberal, Scandia, Oakley, Garden City and Superior, Nebr.; Kansas State Haz Mat; Marathon Petroleum; Union Pacific, BNSF and K and O Watco Railroads; Kansas State Fire Marshall; State of Kansas Emergency Management; Groendyke Trucking; Transportation Security Administration; ICM, the company which built the plant; Poet, the firm which markets Kansas Ethanol’s product; Kansas State Highway Patrol; Kansas State Firefighters Association; Hutchinson Community College; Congressman Jerry Moran’s office; National Cooperative Refinery Association; and neighboring JaCam Chemicals.

K and O Railroad had a locomotive and demonstrated how tank cars were hooked up, and what to do in case of a railroad emergency such as a derailment; and Groendyke had a special training tanker/trailer which participants could go through to see safety demonstrations.

Also participating were several other ethanol-production related vendors, and members of the media.

Jim Misunas
Editor Lyons News
jmisunas@ldn.kscoxmail.com
(620) 257-2368 office
(620) 960-1709 cell phone