Lessons Will Be Learned: Do We Take This Statement Seriously?

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ABSTRACT

After many catastrophes – for instance “natural” such as a tsunami, flood, or lightening strike, or “man made” including financial, political, business, or engineering disasters – a spokesperson will say that lessons will be learned. And for the most part the public probably believes that this will happen – to some extent. But in reality is this the case? In the process industries how do we document and disseminate the lessons learned from both incidents and accidents? Such dissemination may need to be to everyone in a specific production plant, throughout a whole site, to similar sites that the company may own elsewhere, to other companies who are in analogous areas of business or to all others for whom some of the “lessons learned” may be relevant. Professional associations, and those who write codes and standards, will also need to be contacted. For instance a problem (and more importantly a proposed solution) involving a roll call following an emergency evacuation of an offshore production platform may have applications in many totally different types of business activity. As a community of professional engineers and scientists who work in industry we need to recognize that we should be doing a much better job at helping a wide variety of others learn from our incidents. The potential role of a free at the point of use, international, multilingual, database of incidents and the associated lessons that should be learned will be discussed. Some comments regarding funding and possible legal requirements both to submit to, and consult, such a database will be made. An example of a major accident and how it might be classified so as to be of maximum use to others will be discussed.