

Testimony of
Raymond McInnis
Representing himself

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Hearing of the House Committee on Homeland Security's
Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure
Protection:

"The Goodyear Explosion: Ensuring Our Nation is Secure by
Developing a Risk Management Framework for Homeland Security"

Good afternoon. My name is Raymond McInnis. I live in Houston and am retired after working 38 years at the Goodyear Chemical Plant in Houston.

My wife of 18 years, Gloria, had worked at the Goodyear plant for more than 31 years before she was killed in an explosion at that plant two weeks ago today, June 11, 2008. This is not easy for me but I came here today to talk about what happened to Gloria because I don't want this to happen to anyone else. Neither would Gloria. This may sound corny to you but it's the truth.

Gloria was a Latex Coordinator. She loved her job. But it had gotten harder because of all the cuts at the plant. They didn't have enough supervisors with experience, so Gloria was always willing to help out the team wherever and whenever she could. Her motto was "Somebody's got to do it."

As bad as it is losing a loved one like this, one thing that still haunts me is that after the explosion I was originally told by a Goodyear employee that Gloria was safe. You cannot believe how relieved my family and I were to get that good news. Later, I was shocked when I found out that she was dead and that she had lain there for seven hours before she was found. How could Goodyear have not known one of their own was missing? Even though I know now that Gloria was killed in the explosion, my first thought was: Would Gloria be alive and at home today if they had realized that she was missing and tried to find her right away?

The explosion occurred at 7:36 a.m. I saw some fire trucks outside the plant at 8 a.m. but because there seemed to be no activity, I assumed it was a drill. A friend of my son's who works in the Houston Fire Department called me later that morning and asked if Gloria was all right. That was the first I had heard of the explosion. I repeatedly called Gloria's office phone but only got her voice mail. I called the Goodyear office with the same result. I called the gatehouse but got no answer. At 10 a.m., I finally reached Jackie at the gatehouse and asked about Gloria. Jackie told me "She's all right."

At that point, I felt relieved. Friends and relatives were calling and I told them Gloria was okay. I watched the TV news around 11 a.m. The plant manager said everyone was okay, only six minor injuries, that the "all clear" was being given. Again, I felt relieved. I kept trying Gloria's office phone and kept getting voice mail. I assumed she'd be out in the plant helping clean up, because "someone had to do it." Gloria's shift was from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., so I was expecting her home soon.

At 1:45 p.m., Jackie called and asked me "Is Gloria home?" I said, "You mean, you don't know?" That's when I knew. Another woman came on the phone and told me to stay put and they would call me back. I just threw down the phone and rushed to the plant.

The Goodyear plant people kept telling me to go to the office. I didn't want to but finally did. On the way, I ran into a Goodyear employee that I had known when I worked at the plant. He said "I'm so sorry, Mac." That was my official notice from Goodyear. The people in the office kept telling me they were sorry, offering me water, insisting on driving me home. I asked what happened; they said they didn't know. I said I want to see Gloria; they said no, the investigators won't let you. I never spoke with the plant manager, Mr. Lockwood—he talked to the reporters, but he didn't talk to me.

Goodyear drove me home. They later drove Gloria's truck home with her purse.

I ask you ladies and gentlemen of Congress, how can you leave one of your own behind? Why don't you make sure everyone is safe? Who was supposed to count? Who was supposed to report?

When I was a shift foreman, we knew who reported to whom. We knew our responsibilities. We wouldn't have left anyone behind.

Our son is a Marine serving in Iraq. And I want to thank you, Congresswoman Jackson Lee for your help and Congressman Gene Green's help cutting through red tape and getting him home quickly to be with his family at this terrible time. Ask him about leaving anyone behind and he'll tell you a Marine never leaves one of his own behind.

I did not understand why the Houston Fire Department did not go into the plant and search for employees. But my son's firefighter friend explained that the Department had considered going in and told Goodyear several times they were willing to go in but Goodyear was adamant that everyone was accounted for. The Department weighed that against the danger to their rescue crews and decided it was not worth the risk since Goodyear told them everyone was safe. The Fire Department left the plant and then had to be called back after Gloria was found by plant workers.

This plant was a disaster ready to happen and its people are not safe today. The plant has done away with its fire department. EMS crews are trained two days a year only. The total number of employees has been cut. Contract workers who are unfamiliar with the plant have been hired in their place. Supervisors used to be experienced in all plant operations. Now, you can apply to be a supervisor after working at the plant for 90 days. Equipment is patched up again and again rather than replacing it with new equipment

Industrial plants are too interested in promoting themselves by giving lip service to safety rather than actually trying to cut the risk of injury to their workers. Worker safety is taking a backseat. Gloria's case shows you that there are failed

systems in these plants for accounting for the safety and welfare of the individual workers.

Here is another example. My attorney, Terry Bryant, has represented a number of injured plant workers. He has been told that some subcontractors are so concerned about reporting a good safety record that they confiscate an injured worker's ID card and swipe it at the plant as if the employee were on the job, even though the employee is recuperating at home. They do this just so they can report so-many injury-free work days. You can imagine the situation if something bad happens at that plant and family members were told their loved ones are un-accounted for. Additionally, first responders could be putting their lives in danger searching for workers who were never there in the first place! Mr. Bryant suggests OSHA should audit these plants to make sure that they have reliable systems in place to know who's really at work and where at any given time and that they have the proper amount of supervision.

Sure, OSHA sets minimum guidelines. But that's all the plants seem to do—the minimum. No one seems to care until someone dies. Then OSHA puts a fine on a company, the company pays it and life for them continues as before. The lives of my family will not continue as before. Do fines really mean anything to these companies? Perhaps if you changed the system to put someone in jail when their greed drives their safety decisions, then they'll pay attention.

The men and women who work at these chemical and petroleum plants do dangerous jobs that are necessary to keep our country functioning. The least we owe them is to do what we reasonably can to ensure that they are safe in view of the risks of their assignments and to make sure that we never again leave one of our own behind.

I was told by one of Gloria's friends that she was with her in the storeroom that morning when they heard about trouble in that part of the plant. She said Gloria told her "I better go over there and see if I can help." Her friend told her she didn't have to do that but my Gloria said her usual "Someone's got to do it."

Gloria was a wonderful wife, mother, friend and an exceptional employee. If she could have a legacy for her sacrifice, she would want for these plants to be safer for everyone working in them. I thank the members of the Homeland Security Committee for their attention to this problem. I hope a significant improvement will come out of Gloria's death. This is what Gloria would have wanted. God bless you.

I would be pleased to entertain any questions you may have about any statements I have made. Because of the time limit, I could not go into much detail. If you want any more information, you can contact me or my attorney Terry Bryant.