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A Dangerous Business Revisited - Talking Points

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-Talking Points- A Dangerous Business Revisited

By Derek Wilmott

Summary

Five years earlier, FRONTLINE reported on safety issues at the McWane, Inc. The original investigation looked into thousands of injuries and nine deaths at plants owned by the privately held company, one of the largest iron pipe foundry companies in North America. The first half of the documentary explores the violations of OSHA and EPA regulations that eventually led to both civil penalties and criminal convictions. According to the FRONTLINE website:

Between Jan. 1, 2003 and Nov. 30, 2007, McWane plants across the U.S. have amassed at least 221 OSHA violations with proposed fines totaling \$1,063,450. (Proposed fines and citations can be reduced or eliminated on appeal.) By comparison, between Jan. 1, 2003 and Nov. 30, 2007, McWane competitors U.S. Pipe, Griffin Pipe, Mueller, Charlotte Pipe, ACIPCO and AB&I (before it was acquired by McWane in late 2006) have collectively amassed 170 OSHA violations and \$580,106 in proposed fines.

McWane officials now say that after the initial FRONTLINE broadcast that the company has spent more than \$300 million on improvements since 1999, hired three former high-ranking government officials to serve as architects of its turnaround, and forced out many of the old managers at its troubled foundries. McWane stresses that criminal prosecutions and extensive media coverage have resulted in increased scrutiny of its operations, which has led to additional inspections.

Some questions to consider:

- What do you think of the McWane story and its apparent turnaround in protecting their workers and the environment?
- What responsibilities do companies, such as McWane, have in providing a safe working environment for their employees?
- What responsibilities do companies have towards the environment?
- Why do you think that under the federal worker-safety law, causing a worker's death remains a misdemeanor?
- What are your thoughts about the proposed prosecutorial model (Worker Endangerment Initiative) that seeks felony convictions when workers are seriously injured or killed on the job during the course of an environmental violation?