

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

PCAC Hears How Plants Fared in the Big Freeze

April 27, 2021

At the end of April, Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council (PCAC) asked member plants to describe their experiences in Winter Storm Uri, the lessons learned, best practices for future deep, sustained freezes, and any changes they plan to make. In the big freeze, PCAC plants suffered damage primarily from frozen pipes, just as residents did. Many set up a ride-out crew housed at the plant or in a nearby hotel and planned to run during the freeze to keep heat circulating. However, some experienced sudden shutdowns when power, steam, potable water, process water, nitrogen or other operating necessities were lost. Sudden power loss meant some plants needed to flare for safety. Loss of potable water meant no operable safety showers and eye wash stations unless portables had been obtained before the storm. Without nitrogen, safety purges of vessels were switched to temporary backups supplied from portable nitrogen containers or stopped. Others experienced loss of raw materials when their suppliers were affected by the freeze.

Daily video meetings with the Harris County Industrial Liaisons and the Pasadena Office of Emergency Management and other resources gave plants up to date information on weather, road conditions, and so on. Several representatives spoke to the dedication of employees who carried out their work duties while dealing with lack of power and water and sometimes freeze damage at their homes. As plants prepare for a future freeze, the most common plan is to develop sitewide protocols covering a deeper and longer freeze than previous freeze plans.

At the May 25, 2021 meeting, PCAC will brainstorm and prioritize program topics for the remainder of 2021 and early 2022. Readers are welcome to attend the Zoom meeting or email suggestions for the community-industry forum. Contact info@pasadenacac.org for details.