

Mayor Sebastian N. Giuliano

Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

Re: *“Examining the Tragic Explosion at the Kleen Energy Power Plant in Middletown, Connecticut”*

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am Mayor Sebastian Giuliano of Middletown, Connecticut. While I am not in any position to discuss what was happening at the Kleen Energy Plant immediately prior to the explosion, I can discuss our response in the aftermath. I have some brief remarks, the text of which I will place into the record, and then I will be happy to take questions, if members of the Subcommittee would like to ask any.

All Middletown emergency responders were advised of the incident within minutes and immediately went into action. Likewise, emergency responders from neighboring communities all were on site amazingly quickly. Command posts were established and NIMS protocols were instituted. Firefighters were on site to put out the fire and to rescue any victims; Police secured the site and, along with the Fire Marshals and after all rescue operations were completed, searched for and gathered any evidence of the cause and origin of the blast.

The rapid response and the speed with which resources were organized and allocated were due in great part to the training in emergency preparedness that we undergo. That training is provided for and funded, in significant part, by Congress. Without this type of training, this situation undoubtedly would have been even more disastrous.

While prevention is always the best and wisest investment, the nature of the response to an incident can make the difference between minimization of harm and having a situation spiral out of control. I am extremely proud of the manner in which our emergency responders handled this tragedy. They reacted as professionally and competently as they did because they take advantage of every opportunity to train. While we had not trained for this specific incident – our normal scenario is more likely to be a natural disaster such as a hurricane, flood or blizzard – the principles are the same and everybody adapted quickly to the situation.

I would urge that funding for emergency response training for local responders be retained, if not increased. As some of our nation’s largest disasters – both natural and manmade – have demonstrated, the most effective response is local response. More importantly, in most disaster scenarios, state or federal help may be days or weeks away and local responders will likely be “on their own”, at least during the initial stages of an event. Being well trained to identify available resources and how to summon and deploy them, will make the difference in our ability to get through those first few hours or days while waiting for state or federal assistance to arrive, or to determine whether such assistance will be needed at all.

I believe that we in Middletown approached this tragedy with the correct priorities. On February 7, our focus was to bring the event under control, secure the site and search for and rescue victims first, then to recover and remove the remains of those who lost their lives. Once we had accomplished those objectives, the activities changed over to investigation. Whether search and rescue or investigation however, all appropriate steps were taken throughout the process to insure that the site was as safe as possible for those who had to enter.

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Justice requires that, for the sake of the dead and injured, we determine what led to this tragic loss of life and health. To best insure that evidence would be preserved, the Middletown Police, under the supervision of the State’s Attorney for the Middlesex Judicial District, procured a warrant from a Judge of the Superior Court and secured the site as a “crime scene” for approximately three weeks thereafter. During that time, police, along with the South Fire District and the State Fire Marshal, recovered, seized and secured important physical evidence, now undergoing evaluation and testing. It is our hope that everything we have done will help in the search for answers to the questions that everyone has been asking since February: “How did this happen?” and “How can we prevent it from happening to someone else?” If such questions can be answered, then those who lost their lives will rest more peacefully knowing that their fellow workers will be safer in the future.