

DECEMBER 2, 2004

SCHAKOWSKY MARKS 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TRAGEDY IN BHOPAL, INDIA

CHICAGO, IL - Today marks the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal, India, disaster, when 27 tons of poisonous gas leaked from a storage tank at the Union Carbide Corp.'s pesticide plant. More than 7,000 Indians died in the immediate months after accident. The deadly effects continue today.

Between 10 and 30 residents continue to die each month in Bhopal from toxic exposure and 150,000 people continue to suffer long-term health consequences. Drinking water still contains high levels of mercury and other pollutants, toxins and heavy metals. Soil samples from the area have found abnormal amounts of lead, nickel, copper and chromium. Tainted water and the generally toxic living environments have led to premature cancer, deformities, chromosomal aberrations and other disorders for Bhopali children.

On this tragic anniversary, we should renew our commitment to the people of Bhopal. Union Carbide, now a wholly owned subsidiary of the Dow Chemical Co., continues to refuse to appear before the Bhopal District Court to face the criminal charges pending against it for the disaster.

That's why I joined my colleagues in introducing a resolution expressing the commitment of Congress to work with the Indian government to ensure that Union Carbide provides environmental and medical rehabilitation in Bhopal and is held responsible for its actions. There is a "polluter pays" principle enshrined in the domestic laws of both India and the United States, where polluters, rather than public agencies or taxpayers, are held financially and criminally liable for environmental pollution and disasters. We should uphold that principle.

In the post-Sept. 11, 2001, world, we must also act to prevent future toxic disasters from occurring here at home or around the world. The Bhopal anniversary should serve as a reminder of the enormous risks we take by not securing our chemical facilities.

Dec. 2, 1984, was indeed a tragic day for the people of India. We must deal with the continued fallout and resolve to prevent future toxic catastrophes from ever happening

again.