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**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 6
1201 Elm Street, Suite 500
Dallas, Texas 75270**

**REGIONAL HEARING CLERK
EPA REGION 6**

In the Matter of	§	
	§	
Hilmar Cheese Company, Inc. Dalhart, Texas	§	Docket No. CAA- 06-2024-3322
	§	
Respondent.	§	

CONSENT AGREEMENT AND FINAL ORDER

Preliminary Statement

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6 (“EPA” or “Complainant”), and Hilmar Cheese Company Inc. (“Respondent”) have agreed to a settlement of this action before the filing of a complaint, and thus this action is simultaneously commenced and concluded pursuant to Rules 22.13(b) and 22.18(b)(2) of the Consolidated Rules of Practice Governing the Administrative Assessment of Civil Penalties and the Revocation/Termination or Suspension of Permits, 40 C.F.R. §§ 22.13(b) and 22.18(b)(2).

Jurisdiction

1. This proceeding is an administrative action for the assessment of civil penalties instituted pursuant to Section 113(d) of the Clean Air Act (“CAA”), 42 U.S.C. § 7413(d).
2. This Consent Agreement and Final Order serves as notice that the EPA has reason to believe that Respondent has violated the Chemical Accident Prevention Provisions in 40 C.F.R. Part 68, promulgated pursuant to Section 112(r) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r), and that Respondent is therefore in violation of Section 112(r)(7) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(7). Furthermore, this Consent Agreement and Final Order serves as notice pursuant to

Section 113(d)(2)(A) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7413(d)(2)(A), and 40 C.F.R. § 22.34, of the EPA's intent to issue an order assessing penalties for the violation.

Parties

3. Complainant is the Director of the Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Division of EPA, Region 6, as duly delegated by the Administrator of the EPA and the Regional Administrator, EPA, Region 6.

4. Respondent is Hilmar Cheese Company, Inc., a company authorized to conduct business in the state of Texas.

Statutory and Regulatory Background

5. On November 15, 1990, the President signed into law the CAA Amendments of 1990. The Amendments added Section 112(r) to Title I of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r). The objective of Section 112(r) is to prevent the accidental release and to minimize the consequences of any such release of any substance listed pursuant to Section 112(r)(3) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(3), or any other extremely hazardous substance.

6. Section 112(r)(3) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(3), requires the Administrator to promulgate a list of regulated substances which, in the case of an accidental release, are known to cause or may reasonably be anticipated to cause death, injury, or serious adverse effects to human health or the environment. Section 112(r)(5) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(5), requires that the Administrator establish a threshold quantity for any substance listed pursuant to Section 112(r)(3) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(3). The list of regulated substances and respective threshold quantities is codified at 40 C.F.R. § 68.130.

7. Section 112(r)(7) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(7), requires the Administrator to

promulgate regulations that address release prevention, detection, and correction requirements for stationary sources with threshold quantities of regulated substances listed pursuant to Section 112(r)(3) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(3). On June 20, 1996, EPA promulgated a final rule known as the Risk Management Program, 40 C.F.R. Part 68 – Chemical Accident Prevention Provisions, which implements Section 112(r)(7) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(7).

8. The regulations at 40 C.F.R. Part 68 require owners and operators to develop and implement a Risk Management Program at each stationary source with over a threshold quantity of regulated substances. The Risk Management Program must include, among other things, a hazard assessment, a prevention program, and an emergency response program. The Risk Management Program is described in a Risk Management Plan (RMP) that must be submitted to the EPA.

9. Pursuant to Section 112(r)(7) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(7), and 40 C.F.R. § 68.150, an RMP must be submitted for all covered processes by the owner or operator of a stationary source subject to 40 C.F.R. Part 68 no later than the latter of June 21, 1999, or the date on which a regulated substance is first present above the threshold quantity in a process.

10. The regulations at 40 C.F.R. § 68.10 set forth how the Chemical Accident Prevention Provisions of 40 C.F.R. Part 68 apply to each program level of covered processes. Pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 68.10(i), a covered process is subject to Program 3 requirements if the process does not meet the requirements of Program 1, as described in 40 C.F.R. § 68.10(g), and if it is in a specified North American Industrial Classification System code or is subject to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) process safety management standard, 29 C.F.R. §

1910.119.

11. Section 113(d) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7413(d), states that the Administrator may issue an administrative order against any person assessing a civil administrative penalty of up to \$25,000 per day of violation whenever, on the basis of any available information, the Administrator finds that such person has violated or is violating any requirement or prohibition of Section 112(r) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r), and its implementing regulations. The Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996, 31 U.S.C. § 3701, as amended, and the Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015, 28 U.S.C. § 2461, and implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Part 19, increased these statutory maximum penalties to \$37,500 for violations that occurred before November 2, 2015, and to \$57,617 for violations that occur after November 2, 2015, and are assessed after December 27, 2023.

Definitions

12. Section 302(e) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7602(e), defines “person” to include any individual, corporation, partnership, association, State, municipality, political subdivision of a State, and any agency department, or instrumentality of the United States and any officer, agent, or employee thereof.

13. Section 112(r)(2)(A) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(2)(A), and the regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3 defines “accidental release” as an unanticipated emission of a regulated substance or other extremely hazardous substance into the ambient air from a stationary source.

14. Section 112(r)(2)(C) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(2)(C), and the regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3 defines “stationary source,” in part, as any buildings, structures, equipment, installations or substance-emitting stationary activities which belong to the same industrial

group, which are located on one or more contiguous properties, which are under the control of the same person (or persons under common control), and from which an accidental release may occur.

15. Section 112(r)(2)(B) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(2)(B), and the regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3 define “regulated substance” as any substance listed pursuant to Section 112(r)(3) of the CAA, as amended, in 40 C.F.R. § 68.130.

16. The regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3 defines “threshold quantity” as the quantity specified for regulated substances pursuant to Section 112(r)(5) of the CAA, as amended, listed in 40 C.F.R. § 68.130 and determined to be present at a stationary source as specified in 40 C.F.R. § 68.115.

17. The regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3 defines “process” as any activity involving a regulated substance including any use, storage, manufacturing, handling or on-site movement of such substances, or combination of these activities. For the purposes of this definition, any group of vessels that are interconnected, or separate vessels that are located such that a regulated substance could be involved in a potential release, shall be considered a single process.

18. The regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3 defines “covered process” as a process that has a regulated substance present in more than a threshold quantity as determined under 40 C.F.R. § 68.115.

EPA Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law

19. Respondent is, and at all times referred to herein was, a “person” as defined by Section 302(e) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7602(e).

20. Respondent is the owner and operator of the facility located at: 12400 Hwy 385, Dalhart, Texas, 79022 (“the Facility”).

21. On March 16, 2023, there was an incident at the Facility that resulted in an accidental release of 22 pounds of anhydrous ammonia and an injury of one (1) employee (the “Incident”).

22. On January 11, 2024, pursuant to Section 114 of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7414, EPA requested documentation and information concerning the Incident and Respondent’s compliance with Section 112(r) of the CAA 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r), and 40 C.F.R. Part 68 (the “Investigation”).

23. The Facility is a “stationary source” pursuant to Section 112(r)(2)(C) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(2)(C), and the regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3.

24. The Respondent’s facility is a cheese manufacturing plant. The process consists of fluid milk unloading, cheese manufacturing, cheese packaging and storage, liquid whey processing, whey powder packaging, storage, and shipping. Processing aid substances handled and stored onsite consists of ammonia and sanitation chemicals. The Respondent’s processes meet the definition of “process” and “covered process”, as defined by 40 C.F.R. § 68.3. The Respondent’s RMP Program Level 3 covered process stores or otherwise uses a regulated substance in an amount exceeding the applicable threshold.

25. Anhydrous ammonia is a “regulated substance” pursuant to Section 112(r)(2)(B) of the CAA, and the regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.3. The threshold quantity for anhydrous ammonia is 10,000 pounds, as listed in 40 C.F.R. § 68.130.

26. Respondent has greater than a threshold quantity of anhydrous ammonia in a

process at the Facility, meeting the definition of “covered process” as defined by 40 C.F.R. § 68.3.

27. From the time Respondent first had onsite greater than a threshold quantity of anhydrous ammonia in its processes, Respondent was subject to the requirements of Section 112(r)(7) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(7), and 40 C.F.R. Part 68 because it was the owner or operator of a stationary source that had more than a threshold quantity of a regulated substance in a process.

28. From the time Respondent first had on-site greater than a threshold quantity of anhydrous ammonia in its process, Respondent was required to submit a RMP pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 68.12(a) and to comply with the Program 3 prevention requirements because pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 68.10(i), the covered process at the Facility did not meet the eligibility requirements for Program 1 and is in North American Industry Classification System code NAICS 311513 (Cheese Manufacturing) and is subject to the OSHA process safety management standard, 29 C.F.R. § 1910.119.

EPA Findings of Violation

29. The facts stated in the EPA Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law above are herein incorporated.

30. Complainant hereby states and alleges that Respondent has violated the CAA and federal regulations promulgated thereunder as follows:

Count 1 – Operating Procedures

31. The regulation at 40 C.F.R. § 68.69(d) requires the owner or operator of a stationary source with a process subject to Program 3 to develop and implement safe work

practices to provide for the control of hazards during operations such as lockout/tagout; confined space entry; opening process equipment or piping; and control over entrance into a stationary source by maintenance, contractor, laboratory, or other support personnel.

32. At the time of Incident, Respondent failed to identify the risk and hazard prior to and during the work commencing the line breaking.

33. Respondent's failure to develop and implement safe work practices to provide for the control of hazards during opening process equipment or piping, pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 68.69(d), is a violation of Section 112(r)(7) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7412(r)(7).

Consent Agreement

34. For the purpose of this proceeding, as required by 40 C.F.R. § 22.18(b)(2),

Respondent:

- a. admits the jurisdictional allegations set forth herein;
- b. neither admits nor denies the specific factual allegations stated herein;
- c. consents to the assessment of a civil penalty, as stated herein;
- d. consents to any conditions specified herein;
- e. waives any right to contest the allegations set forth herein; and
- f. waives its rights to appeal the Final Order accompanying this

Consent Agreement.

35. Respondent consents to the issuance of this Consent Agreement and Final Order and consents for the purposes of settlement to the payment of the civil penalty specified herein.

36. Respondent and EPA agree to conciliate this matter without the necessity of a

formal hearing and to bear their respective costs and attorneys' fees.

Penalty Payment

37. Respondent agrees that, in settlement of the claims alleged herein, Respondent shall pay a civil penalty of **thirty-eight thousand, five hundred dollars (\$38,500.00)**, as set forth below.

38. Respondent shall pay the penalty within thirty (30) days of the effective date of the Final Order. Such payment shall identify Respondent by name and docket number and shall be by certified or cashier's check made payable to the "United States Treasury" and sent to:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Fines and Penalties
Cincinnati Finance Center
PO Box 979078
St. Louis, Missouri 63197-9000

or by alternate payment method described at <http://www.epa.gov/financial/makepayment>.

39. A copy of the check or other information confirming payment shall simultaneously be sent to the following:

Lorena S. Vaughn
Regional Hearing Clerk
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6
1201 Elm Street, Suite 500 (ORC)
Dallas, Texas 75270-2102
vaughn.loreana@epa.gov; and

Carlos Flores
Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Division
Air Enforcement Branch
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6
1201 Elm Street, Suite 500 (ECDAC)
Dallas, Texas 75270-2101
flores.carlos@epa.gov

40. Respondent understands that its failure to timely pay any portion of the civil

penalty may result in the commencement of a civil action in Federal District Court to recover the full remaining balance, along with penalties and accumulated interest. In such case, interest shall begin to accrue on a civil or stipulated penalty from the date of delinquency until such civil or stipulated penalty and any accrued interest are paid in full. 31 C.F.R. § 901.9(b)(1). Interest will be assessed at a rate of the United States Treasury Tax and loan rates in accordance with 31 U.S.C. § 3717. Additionally, a charge will be assessed to cover the costs of debt collection including processing and handling costs, and a non-payment penalty charge of six percent (6%) per year compounded annually will be assessed on any portion of the debt which remains delinquent more than ninety (90) days after payment is due. 31 U.S.C. § 3717(e)(2).

Dispute Resolution

41. If the Respondent objects to any decision or directive of EPA, the Respondent shall notify the following persons in writing of its objections, and the basis for those objections, within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt of EPA's decision or directive:

Supervisor, Chemical Accident Enforcement Section
Compliance Assurance and Enforcement Division
U.S. EPA - Region 6
1201 Elm St, Suite 500
Dallas, TX 75270-2101

Manager, RCRA & Toxics Enforcement Branch
Office of Regional Counsel
U.S. EPA - Region 6
1201 Elm St., Suite 500
Dallas, TX 75270-2101

42. The Chemical Accident Enforcement Section Supervisor (“Supervisor”) or his designee, and the Respondent shall then have an additional fifteen (15) calendar days from receipt by EPA of the Respondent's written objections to attempt to resolve the dispute. If an

agreement is reached between the Supervisor and the Respondent, the agreement shall be reduced to writing and signed by the Supervisor and the Respondent and incorporated by reference into this Consent Agreement and Final Order.

43. If no agreement is reached between the Supervisor and the Respondent within that time period, the dispute shall be submitted to the Director of the Compliance Assurance and Enforcement Division (Division Director) or her designee. The Division Director and the Respondent shall then have a second 15-day period to resolve the dispute. If an agreement is reached between the Division Director and the Respondent, the resolution shall be reduced to writing and signed by the Division Director and Respondent and incorporated by reference into this Consent Agreement and Final Order. If the Division Director and the Respondent are unable to reach agreement within this second 15-day period, the Division Director shall provide a written statement of EPA's decision to the Respondent, which shall be binding upon the Respondent and incorporated by reference into the Consent Agreement and Final Order.

Notification

44. Unless otherwise specified elsewhere in this Consent Agreement and Final Order, whenever notice is required to be given, whenever a report or other document is required to be forwarded by one party to another, or whenever a submission or demonstration is required to be made, it shall be directed to the individuals specified below at the addresses given (in addition to any action specified by law or regulation), unless these individuals or their successors give notice in writing to the other parties that another individual has been designated to receive the communication:

EPA: Carlos Flores
Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Division

Air Enforcement Branch
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6
1201 Elm Street, Suite 500 (ECDAC)
Dallas, Texas 75270-2101
Flores.carlos@epa.gov

Respondent: Dana Stotsky
On Behalf of Herman Berngen
Environmental Manager
Hilmar Cheese Company, Inc.
12400 US Hwy 385
Dalhart, Texas 79022
hberngen@hilmarcheese.com

Modification

45. The terms, conditions, and compliance requirements of this CAFO may not be modified or amended except upon the written agreement of all parties and approval of the Regional Judicial Officer.

Termination

46. At such time as Respondent believes that it has complied with all terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement and Final Order, Respondent may request that EPA advise whether this Consent Agreement and Final Order has been satisfied and terminated. EPA will respond to said request as expeditiously as possible. This Consent Agreement and Final Order shall terminate when all actions required to be taken by this Consent Agreement and Final Order have been completed, and Respondent has been notified by the EPA in writing that this Consent Agreement and Final Order has been satisfied and terminated.

No EPA Liability

47. Neither EPA nor the United States Government shall be liable for any injuries or damages to persons or property resulting from acts or omissions of the Respondent, their

officers, directors, employees, agents, receivers, trustees, successors, assigns, or contractors in carrying out activities pursuant to this Consent Agreement and Final Order, nor shall the EPA or the United States Government be held out as a party to any contract entered into by the Respondent in carrying out activities pursuant to this Consent Agreement and Final Order.

Effect of Settlement and Reservation of Rights

48. Full payment of the penalty proposed in this Consent Agreement shall only resolve Respondent's liability for federal civil penalties for the violations alleged herein.

49. The effect of settlement described in the immediately preceding paragraph is conditioned upon the accuracy of Respondent's representations to the EPA, as memorialized in paragraph directly below.

50. Full payment of the penalty proposed in this Consent Agreement shall not affect the right of the Agency or the United States to pursue appropriate injunctive or other equitable relief or criminal sanctions for violations of law not addressed in the Consent Agreement and Final Order. This Consent Agreement and Final Order does not waive, extinguish, or otherwise affect Respondent's obligation to comply with all applicable provisions of the CAA and regulations promulgated thereunder.

51. Complainant reserves the right to enforce the terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement and Final Order.

General Provisions

52. By signing this Consent Agreement, the undersigned representative of Respondent certifies that it is fully authorized to execute and enter into the terms and conditions of this Consent Agreement and has the legal capacity to bind the party it represents to this Consent

Agreement.

53. This Consent Agreement shall not dispose of the proceeding without a final order from the Regional Judicial Officer or Regional Administrator ratifying the terms of this Consent Agreement. This Consent Agreement and Final Order shall be effective upon filing of the Final Order by the Regional Hearing Clerk for EPA, Region 6. Unless otherwise stated, all time periods stated herein shall be calculated in calendar days from such date.

54. The penalty specified herein shall represent civil penalties assessed by EPA and shall not be deductible for purposes of Federal, State, and local taxes.

55. This Consent Agreement and Final Order shall apply to and be binding upon Respondent and Respondent's agents, successors, and/or assigns. Respondent shall ensure that all contractors, employees, consultants, firms, or other persons or entities acting for Respondent with respect to matters included herein comply with the terms of this Consent Agreement and Final Order.

56. The EPA and Respondent agree to the use of electronic signatures for this matter pursuant to 40 C.F.R. § 22.6. The EPA and Respondent further agree to electronic service of this Consent Agreement and Final Order by email to the following:

To EPA:

pittman.lawrence@epa.gov

To Respondent:

dstotsky@vnf.com

hberngen@hilmarcheese.com

RESPONDENT:
HILMAR CHEESE COMPANY, INC.

Date: 3/5/2024

DocuSigned by:
Jeremy Travis
C1A81DDC441D4EB...
Signature

Jeremy Travis
Print Name

VP Quality & Technical Services
Title

COMPLAINANT:
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Date: March 11, 2024

Cheryl T. Seager
Director
Enforcement and
Compliance Assurance Division
U.S. EPA, Region 6 Dallas, Texas

FINAL ORDER

Pursuant to Section 113(d) of the CAA, 42 U.S.C. § 7413(d), and the Consolidated Rules of Practice Governing the Administrative Assessment of Civil Penalties and the Revocation/Termination or Suspension of Permits, 40 C.F.R. Part 22, the foregoing Consent Agreement resolving this matter is hereby ratified and incorporated by reference into this Final Order.

Respondent is ORDERED to comply with all of the terms of the Consent Agreement. In accordance with 40 C.F.R. § 22.31(b), the effective date of the foregoing Consent Agreement and this Final Order is the date on which this Final Order is filed with the Regional Hearing Clerk.

This Final Order shall resolve only those causes of action alleged in the Consent Agreement. Nothing in this Final Order shall be construed to waive, extinguish, or otherwise affect Respondent's (or its officers, agents, servants, employees, successors, or assigns) obligation to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local statutes and regulations, including the regulations that were the subject of this action.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Thomas Rucki
Regional Judicial Officer

Date

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that a true and correct copy of the foregoing Consent Agreement and Final Order was filed with me, the Regional Hearing Clerk, U.S. EPA - Region 6, 1201 Elm Street, Dallas, Texas 75270-2102, and that I sent a true and correct copy on this day in the following manner to the addressees:

Copy via Email to Complainant:

pittman.lawrence@epa.gov

Copy via Email to Respondent:

dstotsky@vnf.com

hberngen@hilmarcheese.com
Hilmar Cheese Company, Inc.
12400 US Hwy 385
Dalhart, Texas 79022

Dated this _____ day of _____, _____.

Regional Hearing Clerk
U.S. EPA, Region 6