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BARROW TO REINTRODUCE COMBUSTIBLE DUST BILL

Washington, D.C. – Just before the first anniversary of the tragic explosion at the Imperial Sugar refinery in Port Wentworth, Georgia, Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) has reintroduced the Worker Protection Against Combustible Dust Explosions and Fires Act. The legislation passed the House of Representatives last year by a vote of 247 to 165, but the Senate failed to take action on the bill in the last Congress.

“A year has passed since tragedy struck our community, but so far we haven’t enacted any real change,” said Barrow. “We’ve been told over and over that it’s not a question of if this type of accident is going to happen again, but when. We know what needs to be done. We need to put regulations that work in the workplace. I don’t care how long it will take, but I’m going to keep on pushing it until it gets done.

“Our prayers go out to the folks who are still suffering from their losses and injuries. Meanwhile, we should take this anniversary as a reminder that we have not yet done what we can do to prevent something like this from happening again.”

The Worker Protection Against Combustible Dust Explosions and Fires Act will force the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue rules regulating combustible industrial dusts, like sugar dust, that can build up to hazardous levels and explode. While OSHA already has the authority to issue such a rule without Congress passing new legislation, the agency has failed to act despite the fact that the dangers of combustible dust have been well known for years.

Congressman Barrow’s floor statement follows:

This weekend marks the first anniversary of the combustible dust explosion at the Imperial Sugar refinery in Savannah. What we have learned in my community since that disaster hit is that the experts have known about this problem for decades. The private sector has developed standards that effectively deal with this problem, but the public sector hasn’t responded. The trouble is, not enough people know about the problem, much less the solutions, and those who do know about the solutions aren't required to adopt them.

The only standards that are mandatory really aren't designed with this problem in mind in the first place, and so they aren't working. The result is that we have good standards that are not mandatory and inadequate standards that are mandatory. It ought to be the other way around. Today I'm reintroducing legislation we passed in the last Congress, legislation that will take such upside-down policy and flip it right-side up.

On the anniversary of this latest disaster, our thoughts and prayers go out to the folks who are still suffering from their losses and injuries. But our work to fix what's broken with our regulatory system should continue, until we've done everything we reasonably can to prevent any such disasters from ever happening again.

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