

Two Explosions at Flooded Arkema Chemical Plant in Texas, Evacuation Zone, Devastating Consequences?

By [Zero Hedge](#)

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When the CEO of Arkema America, Richard Rowe, [warned late Wednesday](#) that the company is powerless to prevent an imminent explosion at its Crosby, TX chemical plant, all we could do was wait for the inevitable. We didn't have long to wait, because just a few hours later, on Thursday morning, Arkema said it has been notified about two explosions at the doomed Crosby plant.

At approximately 2:00am local time, the company announced that two explosions and black smoke were reported. According to ABC, several people were taken to hospital.

Arkema confirming 2 explosions at their chemical plant + black smoke. EMS workers tell me people WERE taken to hospital. [#abc13](#) pic.twitter.com/OI70b4UWH8

— Courtney Fischer (@CourtneyABC13) [August 31, 2017](#)

A sheriff's deputy was among those taken to the hospital after inhaling fumes, according to a tweet from the Harris County Sheriff's Office. Nine other deputies drove themselves to the hospital as a precaution.

One deputy taken to hospital after inhaling fumes from Archem plant in Crosby. 9 others drove themselves to hospital as precaution.

— HCSOTexas (@HCSOTexas) [August 31, 2017](#)

Arkema had already evacuated workers, and local authorities had cleared the area prior to the blow. [From the statement](#):

At approximately 2 a.m. CDT, we were notified by the Harris County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) of two explosions and black smoke coming from the Arkema Inc. plant in Crosby, Texas. Local officials had previously established an evacuation zone in an area 1.5 miles from our plant, based on their assessment of the situation.

An Arkema spokesperson stated late Wednesday that a fire at the site was inevitable.

"The fire will happen. It will resemble a gasoline fire. It will be explosive and intense in nature... as the temperature rises, the natural state of these materials will decompose. A white smoke will result, and that will catch fire. So the fire is imminent. The question is when," spokesperson Janet Smith said.



The Arkema Inc. chemical plant on Aug. 30

Rachel Moreno, a spokeswoman for the county fire marshal's office, said it is unclear whether all residents obeyed the evacuation order for the 1.5 mile radius of the plant, adding that the office has received an unconfirmed report of a woman who may still be in the evacuation zone.

The company also said it is working closely with federal, state and local authorities to manage the situation, according to a statement on its website.

As Arkema stores organic peroxides at several locations on the site, the threat of additional explosions remains, it said, adding that the best course of action is to let the fire burn itself out.

We have been working closely with public officials to manage the implications of this situation, and have communicated with the public the potential for product to explode and cause an intense fire. Organic peroxides are extremely flammable and, as agreed with public officials, the best course of action is to let the fire burn itself out.

We want local residents to be aware that product is stored in multiple locations on the site, and a threat of additional explosion remains. Please do not return to the area within the evacuation zone until local emergency response authorities announce it is safe to do so.

Organic peroxides are a family of compounds that are used in a wide range of applications, such as making pharmaceuticals and construction materials.

Meanwhile, Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez stressed during a press conference that "it wasn't an explosion, I want to be very clear, it was not an explosion..." He instead explained the incident as a series of "pops."

"There were different organic peroxides of different grades that were released and it created a pop in the containers where they were being stored and some gray smoke initially emanated from it and eventually turned into black smoke" after a fire began, he said.

Gonzalez went on to state that it is "not anything toxic, it is not anything that we feel is a danger to the community at all..." The "pops" occurred inside one of nine 18-wheel box trucks at the site, according to Bob Royall, an assistant chief with the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office.

"There are nine vans. Of the nine, three had lost refrigeration to keep them cool. the other ones are still under refrigeration," he said, adding that the chemicals are "in containers in cardboard boxes inside the vans."

Royall added that the incident has played out in the way that authorities anticipated.

“Right now everything is going according to what we thought was going to happen so far. We are in a defensive posture, the fire department is out there on the scene, there is air monitoring being deployed by a contractor by the company to try to find out and watch and see where the smoke might go...” he said.

* * *

As a reminder, on [Wednesday the company](#) said it has “no way to prevent” a potentially large explosion and fire at its facility near Houston, after flooding due to Tropical Storm Harvey. The Arkema plant in Crosby, Texas, some 25 miles northeast of Houston, was evacuated late Tuesday. Working with authorities, the company also urged everyone within a mile and a half of the plant to evacuate, and shut down a stretch of Highway 90 that runs alongside the plant, which produces organic peroxides for things like acrylic-based paint.

“We have an unprecedented 6 feet of water throughout the plant,” Arkema’s North American operations Chief Executive Rich Rowe said in a teleconference Wednesday with reporters.

Rowe said that the plant lost primary power and two emergency backup power sources, which led to a shutdown of “critical refrigeration needed for our materials.” He said that means those materials “could now explode and cause a subsequent and intense fire,” and added that “the high water that exists on site, and the lack of power, leave us with no way to prevent it.”

Rowe said about 300 people in all have been evacuated, but said it wasn’t a mandatory evacuation, so he’s not certain whether the 1.5-mile radius around the facility is currently devoid of people. He said it is mostly a rural area, so there are “a limited number of homes” within the area. Rowe said local officials told him the water level in the area could actually continue to rise over the course of the next three to six days, and as such Arkema, which is based in France, believes the chemicals will start to degrade well before that happens.

“And once the chemicals begin to degrade we would be in a situation where we could be looking at a fire and/or an explosion,” he said.

As soon as the chemicals begin to degrade they start to “self-accelerate” in a type of no-turning-back mode, he added.

Rowe didn’t get specific about the amount of chemicals on site or just how big the blast might be, except to say that the analysis of the quantity of chemical is what led authorities to decide on the 1.5-mile evacuation zone they deemed appropriate.

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