

Beat: Miscellaneous

Explosion and fire kill 1, injure 77 at Louisiana chemical plant

-, 14.06.2013, 19:31 Time

USPA News - One person was killed Thursday and more than 70 others were injured when a large explosion and fire ripped through a chemical plant in the U.S. state of Louisiana, officials said. The cause was not immediately known, but terrorism was not suspected.

The incident occurred at around 8:37 a.m. local time on Thursday at the Williams Olefins chemical plant in Geismar, a community about 58 miles (93 kilometers) northwest of New Orleans. More than 300 people were working at the plant at the time of explosion, which caused a fire that created towering flames. Christina Stephens, a spokeswoman for the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, said 77 people were treated at area hospitals and 26 of them remained hospitalized by Friday morning. Rescue workers recovered one body at the site of the blast, and plant owner Williams Companies, Inc. identified the victim as 29-year-old Zachary Green. The company said Green, an operator at the plant, had started working at the plant in October 2012. "We are grieving for the loss of Zack who was part of our Williams community," said Williams' president and CEO Alan Armstrong. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family at this time of sorrow." The Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office initially ordered a shelter-in-place in a two-mile (3.2 kilometer) radius of the plant, but it was lifted when authorities determined there was no health risk to nearby residents. "We have zero concerns for off-site impact," the office said. "Hazardous materials units are on the scene and every effort is being made to assess the situation." Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal quickly went to the scene to assess the situation, and praised the work of first responders. "There were over 300 people evacuated from the plant site. Of the evacuees, eight people were taken by helicopter," he said. "There are 10 people in a safe room in the plant. This is part of emergency protocol for shutting down the plant." The governor's office said the plant was in the process of emergency flaring, and air monitoring is being carried out as a precaution. "There have been no detections above normal levels, but the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is doing additional monitoring out of an abundance of caution," the office said in a statement. It was not immediately clear what caused Thursday's explosion, but federal authorities said terrorism was not suspected. "The fire has been extinguished and Williams is cooperating with federal, state and local agencies in assessing the situation and determining the cause of the explosion," Williams said in a statement on late Thursday evening. "The extent of damage is unknown at this time."

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1113/explosion-and-fire-kill-1-injure-77-at-louisiana-chemical-plant.html>

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