

Plans for NDK in Belvidere at a 'standstill' after Dec. explosion

Some workers are able to return to the plant as an investigation continues.

By **Betsy Lopez Fritscher**

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BELVIDERE — Eighteen NDK America employees returned to work at the Crystal Parkway plant Monday, nearly four months after an explosion in the crystal manufacturing section of the building.

The workers, part of the company's sales arm, had been relocated to a Schaumburg facility after the incident to allow for investigations at the complex and rebuilding of damaged areas that would hinder operations in their wing of the building.

The 55,000-square-foot building at 701 Crystal Parkway opened in 2003 and houses NDK Crystal, the manufacturing aspect of the plant, and NDK America Inc. offices.

The company hasn't ruled out rebuilding in Belvidere. NDK officials remain at a "standstill" as they wait to see what the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board finds when its report comes out later this year, said NDK Crystal attorney Gary Vist. The independent federal agency is charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents.

"Nothing has been ruled out," Vist said. "The company has resigned itself to an understanding that until the investigations are over, which is probably the end of this calendar year, we are not going to be in a position to think about it one way or the other."

Inside the building are several 50-foot-tall, 75-ton vessels in which the company grew synthetic quartz crystal. That crystal is used to make frequency-control devices, which NDK sells to mobile-telephone makers and others for electronic devices.

The Dec. 7 explosion was prompted by the failure of one of those vessels. It will be moved off site and examined during the next six to eight weeks by the Chemical Safety Board. The agency will examine the building interior, too, and survey debris fragments found outside, including an 8,600-pound chunk of the failed vessel, which knocked in a wall at the neighboring Grupo Antolin facility during the explosion.

Another debris fragment, a pipe, struck and killed Ronald Greenfield, 63, of Chesterton, Ind. The truck driver was walking in the parking lot of the Belvidere Oasis — about 400 feet from NDK — when the explosion occurred.

The Washington-based Chemical Safety Board expects to have a draft report of its investigation into the NDK explosion ready by fall, investigations supervisor John Vorderbrueggen said in an e-mail to the Register Star.

While NDK America's workers are back, NDK Crystal's five employees have not been able to resume operations in the building while investigations there continue. Those employees, however, haven't lost morale, said NDK President Ken Hennessy, who supervises both businesses at the plant.

"The spirit of the employees seems to be positive," he said. "I think the community has been terrific toward NDK."

Staff writer *Betsy Lopez Fritscher* can be reached at bfritsch@rrstar.com or 815-544-3452.

NDK lawsuit update

Illinois attorney general spokesman Scott Mulford said NDK has work to do as outlined by Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office, Boone County State's Attorney Michelle Courier and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency before the case's June 18 status hearing.

"A work plan was agreed to by our office, the state's attorney's office and the IEPA for NDK to have experts test for potential on-site soil contamination," Mulford said. "It's scheduled to get under way in the next few days; the case is pending on the testing."

NDK submitted requested documents and met the lawsuit's Jan. 30 court-ordered deadline to submit documentation to government offices stating what chemicals may have been released into the environment after the Dec. 7 explosion at the company's crystal manufacturing plant.

The company was granted a 90-day extension on its 60-day deadline last month as some information cannot be delivered as the lawsuit states, because of the ongoing federal investigation.

"There is some environmental work being done by consultants hired by NDK Crystal," said NDK Crystal attorney Gary Vist. "There is nothing we can advance to deliver the root-cause without the CSB's investigation. NDK Crystal is positive no harm has been done to the land, water or air, and this testing is a part of it. Both sides agreed to a 90-day extension to see where we are at in three months."

Courier and Madigan filed a joint lawsuit against NDK Crystal to compel the company to detail what harmful chemicals were present during a Dec. 7 explosion and to map out solutions to prevent similar incidents from happening at the Crystal Parkway plant. The two-count complaint filed Dec. 31 alleged the company posed environmental and health hazards when the explosion sent a cloud of quartz particles over the area.

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I just love this stuff, quartz particles are about as dangerous as sand blowing on the beach. Lawyers rule!

miltonwaddams

3 hours ago

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Actually, very fine silica sand (quartz) particles are very damaging to the lungs. Growing crystal requires the use of chemicals containing the silicate minerals in solution, so those solvents could be harmful as well.

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