

1 killed at oasis after blast at NDK

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BELVIDERE — A truck driver standing in the parking lot of the Belvidere Oasis was hit by flying debris and killed today after an explosion rocked the **NDK plant at Crystal Parkway, south of U.S. 20.**

The victim, 63-year-old Ronald Greenfield of Chesterton, Ind., was in the parking lot of the Interstate 90 oasis, said Sandra Rogers, Boone County's emergency management coordinator.

Greenfield, a truck driver, was out of his vehicle when he was struck by a large piece of debris.

The westbound entrance ramp to the oasis was closed for nearly two hours after the explosion was reported at 2:34 p.m. Belvidere fire Chief David Worrell said Greenfield was pronounced dead at the scene. However, a helicopter was already en route and transported the man to OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center in Rockford where lifesaving efforts were unsuccessful.

Woman injured

In addition to the death of Greenfield, a woman at nearby Grupo Antolin Illinois Inc., 642 Crystal Parkway, a manufacturer of automobile interior parts and components, also was injured.

"She was thrown some distance, but she was treated at the scene and released," Worrell said.

The tall, 55,000-square-foot building, visible from Interstate 90, opened in 2003 at a cost of \$12.5 million. It houses NDK Crystal and NDK America Inc., and serves as the North American headquarters for their Japan-based parent company, Nihon Dempa Kogyo Co. Ltd.

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

Worrell said one of those pressurized vessels at the west end of the building exploded. Worrell did not know what substance was kept under pressure. The blast blew off a portion of the west end of the building's exterior shell exposing much of the interior of the six- to seven-story tall building to the elements.

"We really have no idea what caused the explosion," Worrell said.

Sheet metal, chunks of concrete, glass and other debris were found several hundred feet away from the plant.

Worrell said firefighters were assessing how safe the building is. There were no flames and no smoke, just an explosion, Worrell stressed.

"The building was designed so that panels will fly away in an explosion, and it worked perfectly," he said.

A Belvidere man visiting family in the nearby Four Seasons mobile home park said the blast knocked every picture off the wall and toppled over a four-legged chair. He thought a truck had fallen off a nearby I-90 overpass.

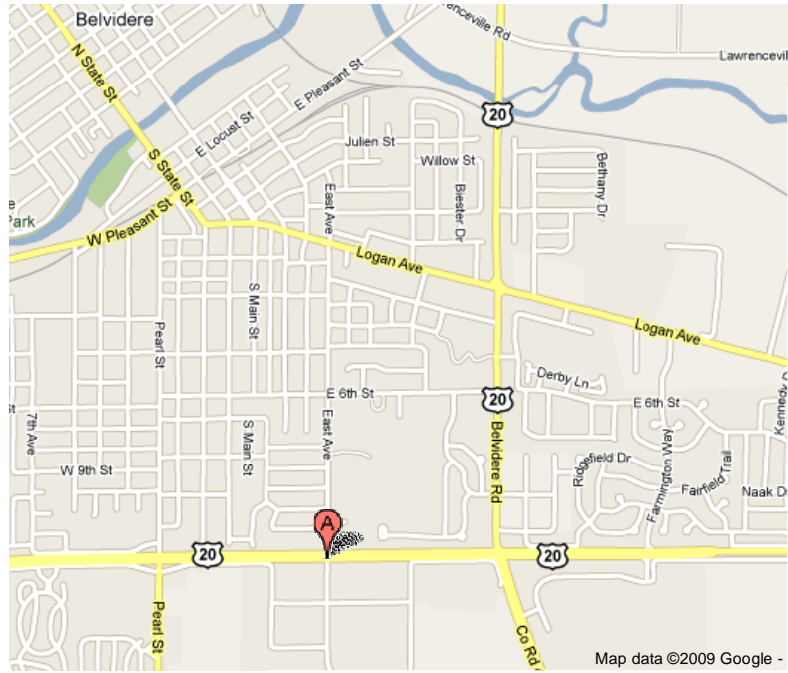
Sarah Pyszka, 28, of Belvidere, was with her boyfriend in the 900 block of Garfield Avenue, several blocks away when the explosion occurred. "He just looked at me, and he said, 'Did you feel that?'" It was very loud. My cousin was at the (AMCORE) bank, and she thought she got rear-ended."

Access to the plant was restricted for much of the evening. A school bus was brought to the scene to keep the NDK plant employees warm and allow investigators to interview them.

Traveling almost as fast as the reverberations from the blast was news of the explosion and fatality. News helicopters from as far as Chicago hovered over the blast site for much of the afternoon recording video footage.

Federal, state, county and city agencies including the Occupational Safety Hazard Administration, the state fire marshal's office as well as the Boone County sheriff's and the Belvidere police and fire departments are investigating.

Register Star reporter Thomas Bona contributed to this report. Staff writer Chris Green can be reached at cgreen@rrstar.com or 815-987-1241.



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