

Investigators: Sabotage unlikely in explosion at quartz facility

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RRSTAR.COM

Posted Dec 10, 2009 @ 11:18 PM

Last update Dec 11, 2009 @ 08:44 AM

BELVIDERE — Members of the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board are certain that the explosion at the NDK plant isn't criminally linked and was accidental.

The group is the main public body conducting on-site investigations.

Investigations supervisor John Vorderbrueggen confirmed Thursday that a pressurized vessel at the west end of the building exploded. The board doesn't know why, but it couldn't have been done deliberately.

"It's almost impossible to do it intentionally," he said. "This particular incident, based on the characteristics, I think it falls right into that, it just couldn't be intentionally done from what we've seen. It's not a detailed chemistry-type issue. This was not a runaway chemical reaction that occurred here. We're confident that is not the cause."

Vorderbrueggen's review matches that of fire Chief Dave Worrell, who told the Rockford Register Star on Monday about the vessel.

The snow has helped keep silica dust from mineral quartz from circulating, Vorderbrueggen said. Nothing environmentally hazardous has been found in the water at the site, but the dust has caused some concern.

"At the time of the explosion, there may have been a release of silica dust, similar to an asbestos-type of inhalation hazard," he said. "We do not believe it's a hazard now because of the weather."

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is keeping an eye out for signs of pollution, spokeswoman Maggie Carson said. The agency's regional air inspector was asked to do an inspection Thursday, but no findings have been reported.

Meanwhile, Chemical Safety Board member William Wark gave more details into the investigation of the property, 701 Crystal Parkway, that houses NDK Crystal, NDK America and serves as the North American headquarters for their Japan-based parent company. The board will remain on site for the coming week.

"Our mandate is to investigate accidents in the chemical industry," Wark said. "To determine the root causes of the accidents ... and make recommendations to industry, to regulatory agencies and to standard-setting organizations to try to prevent such accidents from happening again."

Vorderbrueggen also offered new details into how Ronald Greenfield, 63, of Chesterton, Ind., was killed: "He was struck by a large piece of pipe that was thrown from the facility. It was probably ejected when it was impacted by other components, and I believe it traveled some 400 feet and struck him as he was walking in the parking lot."

And the steel that hit the Grupo Antolin facility and knocked a wall in "is from the pressure vessel itself. A chunk of the vessel, which weighs about 10,000 pounds, went about 400 feet to strike the adjacent building."

Vorderbrueggen confirmed that the pressure vessel was last inspected by the state in September, but those inspections generally are more about proper maintenance.

NDK's \$12.5 million, 55,000-square-foot building, visible from Interstate 90, opened in 2003. Inside are several 50-foot-tall, 75-ton vessels in which synthetic quartz crystal is grown.

The crystal is used to make frequency-control devices, which NDK sells to mobile telephone makers, automotive groups and others for use in electronic devices.

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Sabotage is not only unlikely in the explosion at NDK facility. Why did the RRSTAR bother to say this? What about terrorist plots to fill the air with fake silica so that we would all need respiratory care for the rest of our lives and then support government control of healthcare?

Where is the Union story here? Is this a Union shop? Are the employees working here trained and regulated by a licensing body?

Why the scare with the silica-like dust? Are we supposed to believe that as long as snow is on the ground that all will be ok? At what % concentration would the available air be to create a concern? This report made it seem like there was a potential problem with the dust that was averted because we have snow. The silica-like sand is not water soluble. If the snow was saving us, as soon as the snow is off the dust we would be in danger!

Yes the sky is falling and the earth is tilting. Global warming saves us from the ice age that was here in the late 70s, and we don't need the RRSTAR to set up a panic.

Do some investigation. Who are the workers? What language do they speak?

There were two important news items in this story.

- 1). Investigators found no wrong doing and that there is no danger to the public from the results of the accident.
- 2). This company was manufacturing a product. This company is manufacturing a product that is used every day in the electronics we use.

More should have been told about this manufacturing company and what will be done locally to help get them up and running. Manufacturing made us great in the past and it will make us great in the future!

extra
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and chicken little said.....cluck.....cluck

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