

Death toll rises to six in Michigan power plant disaster

Two more workers die from Ford Rouge explosion

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Two more workers have died from injuries sustained in the February 1 explosion at the Ford Rouge works in Dearborn, Michigan, bringing the death toll from the blast to six.

John Arseneau, 45, died on Saturday morning, February 20, at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor. Ronald Moritz, 46, a pipe fitter foreman, died that evening in the same facility.

Arseneau is survived by his wife and three children, ages 17, 14 and 12. Moritz is survived by his wife and eight children, four of them adopted. The six workers who have died so far are survived by a total of 22 children and at least five grandchildren.

The four workers who died earlier were Donald Harper, 58; Cody Boatwright, 51; Warren Blow, 51; and Ken Anderson, 44. The three workers in their 50s died first: Harper killed instantly by the blast, Boatwright on February 5 and Blow on February 12. The younger men, all in their 40s, lingered longer before dying of burns which covered 30 percent to 90 percent of their bodies, with Anderson dying first, on February 14.

Eight workers remain hospitalized, while two, Ralph Irvin, 53, and Gerald Nyland, 47, have been released. Irvin was sent home February 18, but faces lengthy and painful recuperation from severe burns. Nyland was released February 20, the same day that two of his coworkers died.

Three workers remain in critical condition: John Sklarczyk, 47, Gerald Moore, 55, and Dennis Arrington, 47. Four others--Vincent Fodera, 46; Chris Getts, 46; John Kucharski, 40; Geremia Villalta, 64--are in serious condition. An unnamed man at Detroit Receiving Hospital has been upgraded to fair.

The massive burn injuries suffered by the victims of the Rouge explosion are particularly difficult to treat. Doctors estimated that their chances were only 50-50 when they were brought in, and this grim prognosis has been verified over the past three weeks.

Of the nine victims originally taken to the University of Michigan hospital, the leading burn specialist facility in the region, four have now died, while two have been released and three have improved from critical to serious condition. All three victims taken to St. Vincent's Medical Center in Toledo, Ohio, remain in critical condition, two with burns over 80 percent of their bodies. Of the three taken to Detroit Receiving, Ken Anderson died, while the other two have improved, one to serious, the other to fair. Those who survive face an extremely painful and difficult period of treatment, with repeated skin graft operations.



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