

Eleven workers hospitalized after chemical leak at Nestlé plant in Illinois

George Gallanis
18 June 2016

The Nestlé Willy Wonka candy manufacturing plant in Itasca, Illinois, 27 miles northwest of Chicago, was evacuated early Friday morning after a burst pipe leaked out lithium chloride, which is used to control humidity levels in the plant. Eleven people were hospitalized.

In total, 17 people reported having respiratory problems, but six declined to receive treatment.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, at about 1:25 a.m., the Itasca Fire Protection District responded to a call from the plant. Upon their arrival, the plant had already been evacuated. Paramedics treated 17 workers for respiratory issues.

Roz O'Hearn, Nestlé's corporate and brand affairs director, stated that workers had been "experiencing nausea and other symptoms" after coming into contact with the chemical lithium chloride.

The spill itself happened at approximately 9:30 p.m. Thursday when a pipe burst, leaking out the chemical. The spill was thought to be contained, but a few hours later employees began reporting having health issues.

Itasca's Deputy Fire Chief John Radzinski reported that approximately five gallons of the chemical solution spilled from the pipe with about 50 people in the factory when it occurred.

Scott Allen, a spokesperson for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), stated that the organization had opened an investigation and had sent compliance officers to the scene to investigate. Allen is planning to interview workers and witnesses to determine the cause of the incident.

Allen was quoted in local media saying that lithium chloride is "very dangerous," stating further, "It is not harmless, that is for sure." Lithium chloride is known to cause inflammation of the eyes, skin and respiratory systems, among other things.

What happened at the Willy Wonka plant happens daily throughout the United States and the world. Aside from the fact that workers have to work just to make a living, many workers today are confronted with the fact that going to work may mean risking their health or losing their life.

In the never-ending drive for increased profits, workers are pushed to work harder and faster and factories are given only the most basic maintenance to ensure they keep running. As one worker commented on glassdoor.com on the conditions of the Willy Wonka Plant, "Outdated facility not suit (sic) to meet the high volume production demands; as well as overall environment was unfriendly." One wonders what else can and will go wrong at the Nestlé factory.

It is not at all farfetched to assume that the heads of corporations understand and accept that operating old and obsolete factories continuously and without the proper maintenance will most likely lead to the deaths of workers. In the name of profit, such things are a minor inconvenience.

Indeed, in 2014 OSHA reported that 4,821 workers in the United States died on the job. Work related deaths continue to pile up in 2016.

Reporting on their web site, OSHA wrote: "Worker fatally crushed by garbage truck trash compactor" at Metro Waste Systems in San Antonio, Texas; another worker died "after falling into vat of boiling water and oil" at a Goodyear Tire and Rubber factory; and another perished "after falling into cement mixer."

Such deaths are easily avoided. Basic remedies such as better equipment, basic maintenance and upkeep and more staff—to name a few—can resolve the many conditions that lead to mistakes and death. But under capitalism, such basic steps are subordinated to the interest of corporations and the ruling class.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact