

1 worker killed, another 13 injured in Ohio metal factory explosion

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21 February 2023

An explosion at the I. Schumann & Co. metal plant in Bedford, Ohio, killed one worker and injured another 13 Monday afternoon.

Steven Mullins, a 46-year-old man from North Ridgeville, Ohio, was found dead at the scene, according to the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office.

Mullins had worked for the company for nearly 30 years, starting work just as he was finishing high school and had been on the plant's maintenance crew at the time of the explosion. A statement issued by the company did not provide further details.

A number of the workers injured in the blast were taken to nearby hospitals. Medical officials report that several workers suffered severe burns and had to be removed from the building. One worker in critical condition was taken by helicopter. Other workers were treated by first responders at the scene.

The plant, which makes copper and other alloys, is located about 15 miles southeast of Cleveland.

Workers at the plant report that there were two explosions: a smaller explosion followed by a larger one around 2:30 p.m. The second explosion was so powerful that it knocked over a large portion of the plant's walls. Several workers were injured by falling debris. Bricks and other debris landed on cars and parking lots of nearby businesses. Some windows and doors were also blown out.

Jeff Huhn, who works inside sales at Mid-State Sales across the street, heard the explosion.

"We were just loading up a truck, getting ready to leave, and it was the loudest noise we ever heard," Jeff told the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

"Everything was shaking, things were falling off the shelves here. We looked out and saw a huge plume of smoke. About 40 feet down from the entrance, it blew

up half the building. It blew debris and shrapnel; there were cars on fire. We just saw pandemonium after the explosion."

Photos of the site show a section of brick wall, roughly 200 feet long by 30 feet high, completely blown out, with bricks and large sections of steel beams laying on top of cars that were parked below.

While the cause of the blast is under investigation, a 2006 blast at the plant caused by molten metal injured five workers.

In a statement, the company pledged to cooperate in the investigation to determine the cause.

"We will work alongside investigators in their search for answers as part of our commitment to Northeast Ohio, where we have been operating for more than 100 years. Our thoughts and prayers are with our team members and their families at this difficult time."

The plant first opened in 1917 and has been in business more than 100 years. It primarily produces metal alloys in pellet and ingot forms that are then used by other companies for the production of many different products.

The company was cited twice recently by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for safety violations, and the cases are still open. One of the violations is defined as a "serious violation" regarding the control of hazardous energy.

A March 2019 incident involved an employee getting burned while taking a sample from a pot of molten metal. OSHA found that the employee was not wearing fire-resistant clothing. The company was fined \$12,000 for that incident. It is not clear if it has paid the fine or is appealing the ruling.

Cleveland19 News also found that last July, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency found 11 environmental violations, including the "unlawful

storage and disposal of hazardous waste.”

On Saturday a separate, unrelated explosion at the ArcelorMittal Warren coke plant in eastern Ohio could be heard for miles. A spokesperson for the Cleveland-Cliffs plant in Warren said that a boiler exploded and that no one was injured.

“Cleveland-Cliffs confirms that a boiler failed at its Warren Coke facility this afternoon causing a loud noise heard throughout the adjacent areas to the plant. No employees were injured, and the facility continues to operate normally with redundant boilers.”

Both plants are less than 75 miles from East Palestine, Ohio, the site of the Norfolk Southern train derailment and explosion followed by the deliberate burn-off of highly toxic vinyl chloride, which has poisoned the town of East Palestine and the surrounding area.

Nearly three weeks after the February 3 disaster, residents of East Palestine are still suffering from nosebleeds, headaches, burning lips, throats and eyes. Company, state and federal officials have all said that the water and air are now safe but have given residents no answers as to why many are still getting sick.

Furthermore, no one has told local residents the long-term effects of exposure to vinyl chloride, a documented carcinogen which causes cancer of the liver, brain and blood. OSHA limits exposure to vinyl chloride to just one part per million over an 8-hour shift.

In a statement issued by the the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee “The answer to the East Palestine disaster: Railroad workers’ control over safety and working conditions” the committee explained that safety is being sacrificed for profits, and safety can only be assured when workers “control the decision-making and take it out of the hands of the Wall Street speculators and their lackeys.”

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