

Teenager killed by exploding metal canister in Michigan warehouse fire

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A fire in an industrial building in Clinton Township, Michigan broke out on Monday evening, causing canisters holding combustible material to explode. Projectiles flying out from the fire killed a teenager and injured another person who were in the vicinity of the building.

According to authorities, the fire began in the warehouse of Goo Smoke Shop and Select Distributors, near Groesbeck Highway and 15 Mile Road. The blaze erupted at approximately 8:50 pm and sent exploding metal canisters into the air, some landing up to two miles away. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Clinton Township Fire Chief Tim Duncan said early Tuesday, “The explosion definitely blew the building apart. The area around it was like a war zone, there was so much debris from the explosion.”

Local news media reported that the company sells vaping materials, novelties, electronics and other merchandise to discount and convenience stores. A report in *The Macomb Daily* said the company “also supplied gas canisters for the local vaping industry for vape pens, along with other products.”

Police reported that a 19-year-old, who was observing the fire from a parking lot at a nearby car wash, was struck by shrapnel from the explosions. He was taken to a local hospital and died Tuesday morning from his injuries, which were originally attributed to gun violence.

Township Police Chief Dina Caringi said, “That was due to the chaos of the scene. We had projectiles falling from different directions and the loud explosions, so it was determined to be a gunshot wound before we found it wasn’t gunfire.”

The teenager’s name has not been released. A ten-year veteran township firefighter, identified as Matt Myers, was also injured when a canister crashed into the windshield of his fire truck.

Hundreds of canisters littered the roadways around the

building. Fire investigators reported that the canisters were filled with butane or nitrous oxide, which were likely used in the vaping cartridge process.

At around 11:00 pm on Monday, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel spoke with news reporters and confirmed the blaze was mostly under control, but fire crews would work into Tuesday morning to extinguish it.

Authorities closed Groesbeck Highway between 14 Mile and 16 Mile Roads until Tuesday morning. The *Macomb Daily* reported that cleanup efforts began on Tuesday, “even as hot spots flared up and small secondary explosions were reported.” CN Rail was assessing its railroad in the area for potential damage.

The *Detroit Free Press* reported on Tuesday that the butane and nitrous oxide tanks should not have been stored in the building. The report said that “canisters measuring 12-18 inches and weighing 10-15 pounds exploded during a blaze at Goo Smoke Shop, 19100 15 Mile Road, a former Save-A-Lot retail and warehouse store.”

Township Supervisor Bob Cannon told the *Free Press* that the permits applied for at the site were “to do something that we thought they were going to do, which was legal...” He said the business “ended up doing something that is clearly not only illegal, but immoral and dangerous.”

Township authorities say that at the time the permits were approved and business inspections were made, there were no canisters in the building. The officials said they knew about the vape products, but not the butane and nitrous oxide storage.

The *Detroit News* said the explosions shot debris into the air that landed as far as two miles from the building. The *News* reported that the canisters “careened from the site with such force that they embedded into buildings and cars.” Other objects found in the debris included knives and blades that were flying through the air.

Witnesses reported that the scene sounded and looked like a war zone. The odor of burning plastic hung in the air. Some residents reported that they saw their neighbors packing up, getting in their cars and leaving the area during the fire and hours-long continuous series of explosions.

Greg Conley, director of legislative and external affairs for the American Vapor Manufacturers industry group, told the *News* that the butane stored in the facility was likely used for manufacturing marijuana products. Butane can be used to extract THC from cannabis. The final product is an oil that has the consistency of honey or wax and can be used in vaporizers, he said.

Conley continued:

Nicotine vaping products are water-based, so there is no oil, there's no extraction process. You can buy the nicotine that's already been extracted from the tobacco leaf in professional labs, so you don't have people trying to do science in their backyard. And meanwhile, with THC vaping products, they're oil-based and require somebody to extract the THC from the actual marijuana. And that involves chemicals and, in some cases, can involve chemicals that can cause fires.

Fire Chief Caringi reported that four employees were inside the shop working on filling online orders when they heard "popping sounds." They evacuated the building minutes before it exploded. Part of the investigation will include retrieving internal surveillance camera video to see what happened from inside the building when the fire began.



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