

No charges or investigation one week after fatal industrial explosion in Detroit suburb

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12 March 2024

More than a week after industrial explosions rocked the Detroit suburb of Clinton Township, Michigan, killing a young bystander and spewing gas canisters and shrapnel as far as two miles from the blast site, the police and local authorities have yet to initiate an investigation or lay any charges against the owners of the cannabis business that erupted in flames and multiple detonations.

The fire that enveloped the building housing both the Goo Smoke Shop and Select Distributors warehouse near Groesbeck Highway and 15 Mile Road began at approximately 8:50 p.m. on Monday, March 4. Violent explosions occurred throughout the night, according to fire crews. An orange glow in the night sky was observed more than eight miles away.

One of these explosions ended the life of 19-year-old Turner Lee Salter, who was standing a quarter-mile from the blast site when he was struck by a 12- to 15-pound nitrous oxide canister.

The delay in the investigation is said to be due to the fact that the fire is still smoldering, and small fires have reignited in two areas on the west end of the property, despite the Clinton Township fire department having doused the site with more than 2 million gallons of water throughout the week.

Officials say structural steel from the collapsed building must be removed before investigators can begin to do their work. Some of the structural steel is still too hot to be removed, even by machines. Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) personnel have, moreover, informed township officials that there is a potential for more explosions once the heavy steel pieces are moved.

Describing the ongoing catastrophe at the blast site, Macomb County Emergency Management Coordinator Paul Brouwer said, “In one corner of the building

where there was a major collapse, there’s still some burning there, and every once in a while it flares up and the fire department goes back and gets it down.” The township has declared a local state of emergency.

The *Macomb Daily* reported over the weekend that local officials expected an investigation would begin sometime this week. The investigative team includes members of the Clinton Township police and fire departments, the ATF, the Michigan State Police and private investigators.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has also been at the site to inspect the area and collect potentially contaminated fire debris and hazardous items, including vape pens and lithium batteries. Drones have located some of these items as far as two miles from the blast site, threatening to trigger dozens of smaller disasters.

The intersection where the blast took place still looks like a war zone, with thousands of small canisters of lighter fluid scattered all over Clinton Township. Hundreds of heavier canisters of highly explosive butane and nitrous oxide are scattered by the side of railroad tracks.

As for holding anyone accountable for the ongoing disaster, Clinton Township Police Captain Anthony Coppola said that the owners of the business are cooperating with his department and have been questioned by members of the ATF. The owners’ names have not been released to the public. No one is in police custody and no charges have been filed.

Clinton Township is a largely blue-collar community, with a mixture of young adults under the age of 35 (roughly 46 percent of the population) and older retired workers (roughly 19 percent). The median household income in the township is slightly below the national average, near \$64,000.

The building that blew up housed a Save-A-Lot grocery store before it was taken over by the smoke shop several years ago. Last week, authorities said the building was not supposed to house the flammable butane tanks that were found on the property. The building hadn't been inspected since September 2022, at which time the hazardous canisters were reportedly not present.

According to local zoning officials, the building was not zoned for industrial use, but only retail activity. No permit was ever acquired to store hazardous materials.

The large smoke shop sits next to a Walgreens Pharmacy, a Burger King location, a manufacturing facility owned by Alpha Precision Aerospace and a warehouse called S&G Machinery Sales. More than 50 employees work on the corner where the blast took place. Had the fire broken out during work hours, many more people would likely have been killed.

Clinton Township Fire Chief Tim Duncan said, "It's unbelievable that more people were not injured or killed. How we managed to get through it with what we did, I can't answer. There was someone looking out for us that day."



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