

# Plant explosion in Roseland, Louisiana threatens local air and water quality

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An explosion at Smitty's Supply, Inc.'s oil and lubricant manufacturing plant in Roseland, Louisiana, a small town of less than 1,000 people 50 miles (80 kilometers) northeast of Baton Rouge, occurred last Friday in the early afternoon, releasing a thick black cloud of smoke, ash and other debris into the atmosphere.

A mandatory evacuation order for the area in the one-mile radius of the plant was issued following the explosion. The evacuation zone, however, has shrunk and the majority of the town's residents have been permitted to return to their homes as of this writing.

Roseland Montessori School was evacuated on the day of the explosion, and reopened on Tuesday.

While the cause of the explosion is still undetermined, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which has been directed to lead to fire containment and cleanup effort, stated that the fire at the 20-acre (8 hectares) facility was 98 percent contained as of Monday.

No injuries or deaths have been reported, though the 450 employees at the plant have lost their employment. One worker told a local news station that the plant was "one of the biggest plants in Tangipahoa Parish. Everyone, pretty much, depended on it."

Founded in 1969, the company's website states that it is "one of the leading manufacturers in the world of lubricants and related products" such as engine oils, greases and automotive "brake fluid, power steering fluid, gear oils and antifreeze." It has contracts with "the Shell, Pennzoil, Quaker State, Chevron, and Castrol brands," and distributes its products "nationwide and to over 90+ foreign countries." In addition to the Roseland facility, it has facilities in Hammond, Indiana, Vicksburg, Mississippi and Jasper, Texas.

The list of products the company manufactures gives an ominous indication of the dangerous material that has polluted the atmosphere, land and adjacent waterways in the proximate area and neighboring regions.

A company report submitted to state regulators in 2023 and cited by local news sources states that "20 separate tank farms with 265 steel or plastic above ground storage units" were housed at the plant, with the tanks holding "between 2,000 and 504,000 gallons of various but generally flammable liquids."

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) and EPA reported on Saturday that they were "conducting air quality monitoring both within and outside this zone" and that "all air monitoring results have shown either non-detectable readings or levels well below health-based or actionable thresholds, as confirmed earlier today by the Louisiana State Police (LSP)."

Samples of soil and soot have been collected for lab analysis but no results have been released so far.

Republican Governor Jeff Landry, one of six governors who have sent national guard troops to Washington, D.C. at the behest of President Donald Trump, said in a press conference that the aftermath of the explosion has not caused an "immediate danger to wildlife or to human health."

Local residents, on the other hand, have upheld suspicions of the quality of the environment in response to the explosion.

At a town hall meeting in the adjacent town of Amite City on Monday, one resident said, "As far as them saying we don't know what the chemicals are, all the containers at Smitty's are labeled." Another said, "They know every [Safety Data Sheet] in that facility—period. To withhold that from these people,

that's wrong 100 percent."

A new study published in *Science Advances* found that "the health impacts and inequities from pollutants produced along the O&G [oil and gas industry] lifecycle" causes "annual burdens of 91,000 premature deaths attributable to fine particles (PM2.5), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), and ozone [O<sub>3</sub>], 10,350 PM2.5-attributable preterm births, 216,000 incidences of NO<sub>2</sub>-attributable childhood-onset asthma, and 1610 lifetime cancers attributable to hazardous air pollutants (HAPs)."

Additionally, "Most downstream air pollution manifests as concentrated, isolated enhancements at locations with large oil-refining activities in eastern Texas and in southern Louisiana."

Another major concern of residents is the presence of oil in the local waterways, ditches and ponds since the day of the explosion.

Despite efforts in using water containment booms to halt the spillage of oil, residents some 30 miles south of the Tangipahoa River, which runs alongside the explosion site, have reported seeing oil on the surface of the river.

The presence of oil so far south along the river is a major concern given that it empties into Lake Pontchartrain, the state's largest inland body of water.

The situation, though on a much smaller scale, nonetheless recalls the disastrous British Petroleum (BP) Deepwater Horizon explosion in 2010, which killed 11 oil workers and released over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Just as BP was given a slap on the wrist for one of the worst environmental and industrial disasters in history, it is to be expected that Smitty's Supply, which has previously been fined by the EPA for violating the Clean Water Act by "releasing contaminants into drainage areas, including oil, grease, fecal coliform and carbon compounds such as methane and ethanol," will walk away relatively unscathed following the explosion.

The incident in Roseland is a part of a recent string of industrial explosions in the US and around the world, some of which are:

- A massive explosion on the morning of June 14, 2021 at the Chemtool plant in Rockton, Illinois.

- An explosion at Givaudan Sense Colour factory in Louisville, Kentucky on November 12, 2024, killing

two workers and injuring 11.

- A fire triggered a series of massive explosions at a fireworks warehouse in the northern California town of Esparto on July 1, killing seven workers.

- An explosion at Sigachi Industries, a pharmaceutical factory in the southern Indian state of Telangana, on June 30 killed 42 workers and left many others injured.

- An explosion at a petrol station in Rome, Italy on July 4 sent fireballs and shockwaves throughout the surrounding area, injuring 45 residents and emergency service workers and killing one of the workers who died with over 55 percent burns to his body.

An explosion at US Steel's Clairton Coke Works near Pittsburgh on August 11 killed two workers and injured 10 others, highlighting the facility's longstanding safety issues and corporate negligence amid ongoing deregulation and weakened enforcement.

In the US alone, the world's richest country, more than 5,000 workers die from injuries and 135,000 from work-related illnesses each year, with over 3 million suffering non-fatal injuries, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Worldwide, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported in 2023 that "Nearly three million workers die every year due to work-related accidents and diseases, an increase of more than 5 per cent compared to 2015."

This heinous and entirely preventable number of workplace deaths and injuries are, for the ruling capitalist class, the necessary sacrifice the working class must make to ensure the increasing flow of profits into the private coffers of the corporations, their shareholders and political lackeys. This is the not-so-hidden message behind Jeff Landry proclaiming that Smitty's Supply is an "absolutely vital and important" company that allows "us to enjoy the quality of life not only in this country but in this world."



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