

16 workers killed in explosion at Tennessee munitions plant: Another tragedy in America's industrial slaughterhouse

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At 7:45 a.m. Central Time Friday, a massive explosion tore through the Accurate Energetic Systems (AES) munitions plant in Bucksport, Tennessee, killing 16 and injuring more than a score of workers. Describing the incident as a “mass detonation,” local officials have confirmed that 19 employees are missing and feared dead, roughly one-quarter of the company’s workforce.

Humphreys County Sheriff Chris Davis said the scene was one of utter devastation. “There’s nothing to describe. It’s gone,” he told reporters. “We are missing 19 souls right now. It’s one of the most devastating situations I’ve been on in my career,” he said in remarks to the *New York Times*.

The blast leveled at least one structure, believed to be Building Six of the company’s eight-building facility, and was so powerful that it rattled homes more than a dozen miles away and sent a plume of smoke large enough to appear on the radar of a Nashville television station.

Witnesses described the terror that swept through the rural community located 50 miles southwest of Nashville. Gentry Stover, who lives nearby, told Associated Press the concussion shook him awake: “I thought the house had collapsed with me inside of it. I live very close to Accurate and realized about 30 seconds after I woke up that it had to have been that.”

Outside the shattered plant, families waited in anguish for word of the injured and missing. Ava Hinson told the *Times* her son, Jeremy Moore, had worked at AES for nearly 20 years. “We don’t know where he is,” she said. Nathan Birchard, whose girlfriend Rachel Woodall was on the early shift, stood with relatives and coworkers waiting for updates.

“Please pray for my girlfriend,” he wrote on social media before driving to the scene.

Authorities said the cause of the explosion remains under investigation. The FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives are on site, and Sheriff Davis cautioned that reaching the center of the wreckage could take days. “It wouldn’t surprise me at all if we’re here next week,” he said.

Accurate Energetic Systems is a privately held explosives manufacturer that operates on a 1,300-acre site with eight production buildings. The company produces and tests high-energy materials including RDX (cyclonite), TNT, and PBXN-series military explosives, for the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security and commercial demolition clients. AES employs roughly 75 workers and is one of the few sources of stable employment in the economically depressed rural counties west of Nashville.

This is the second deadly explosion at the same site in just over a decade. In April 2014, another blast destroyed a building used to manufacture ammunition components, killing one worker and critically injuring three others. That facility was then operated by Rio Ammunition, one of several defense contractors that have worked on the property.

Records from the Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration (TOSHA) show that AES was cited for five serious violations in 2019 after multiple employees suffered seizure events while working with RDX powder. Investigators determined that the workers experienced central nervous system impairment after drying and sifting the compound without adequate protective gear. Wipe samples from

employees' skin and break room surfaces tested positive for RDX residue, proving exposure through absorption and ingestion.

RDX (cyclonite) is a potent neurotoxin. The National Center for Biotechnology Information reports that exposure can cause "convulsions and unconsciousness, accompanied by headache, dizziness, and vomiting," while chronic exposure can damage the liver and kidneys.

After years of appeals, AES reached a settlement with TOSHA in 2023 that vacated or downgraded the violations to "other-than-serious." In exchange, the company promised only minor improvements such as installing a hand-washing station and providing long-sleeve uniforms. The final penalty was \$7,200, roughly the value of a single batch of military-grade explosives.

The Tennessee explosion comes only days after a blast at Chevron's El Segundo refinery in California. As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported, such disasters are "virtually daily occurrences in America," with fatal explosions, fires, and toxic exposures killing workers in Texas, Louisiana, Colorado and Nebraska in recent months. These are "not accidents in any meaningful sense," the WSWs explained, but "social crimes, predictable outcomes of a deregulated, profit-driven system that treats human lives as expendable."

The federal government shutdown, which began on October 1, 2025, after Congress failed to pass a funding bill, has paralyzed workplace safety enforcement across the country. Under its contingency plan, the Department of Labor has furloughed most of its staff, leaving the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) with only 460 of its 1,664 employees on duty to respond to "life-and-property" emergencies. All routine inspections, outreach, and training have been suspended, according to Engineering News-Record.

Compounding this paralysis, the Trump administration's fiscal year 2026 budget proposal would cut nearly \$50 million from OSHA and eliminate 223 positions, further eroding what little oversight remains. With three-quarters of OSHA's workforce sidelined and deeper cuts planned, thousands of high-risk worksites now operate with no federal safety oversight. The explosion in Tennessee exposes the deadly consequences of this government-engineered collapse of regulation.

The explosion at Accurate Energetic Systems is not an isolated event but part of a systemic breakdown of workplace safety that has been decades in the making. The bipartisan rollback of safety regulations, token fines and the subordination of oversight agencies to corporate profit have made such catastrophes inevitable.

The dead and missing in Tennessee join the thousands of workers killed each year in what can only be described as America's industrial slaughterhouse. Their deaths were preventable. Every ignored warning, every vacated violation and every political concession to the corporate elite paved the way for this tragedy.

The defense of workers' lives cannot be entrusted to government regulators, the courts, or corporate management. Rank-and-file safety committees, organized independently by workers themselves, must take control of workplace safety, demand full transparency in investigations, and link up with other sections of workers across industries and states to build a unified network of rank-and-file committees capable of asserting democratic control over working conditions and prioritizing the lives of all workers over profit.



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