

Tennessee munitions plant explosion: 24,000 pounds of explosives detonate—more powerful than the “Mother of All Bombs”

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Federal investigators have concluded the initial phase of their inquiry into the catastrophic explosion that tore through the Accurate Energetic Systems (AES) facility in Bucksnort, Tennessee, on October 10, killing 16 workers and injuring at least four others.

Officials from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the National Center for Explosives Training and Research now estimate that between 24,000 and 28,000 pounds of high explosives detonated in a chain reaction that leveled the 15,000-square-foot building.

The blast was so immense that it exceeded the explosive power of a US GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, the so-called “MOAB,” “the largest non-nuclear bomb in the American arsenal, with a payload of 18,700 pounds of TNT equivalent.”

ATF agent Brice McCracken told reporters on October 24 that the explosion began in one of six kettles on the production floor of the “pour-cast” building where *cast boosters*, a mixture of TNT and RDX (cyclonite), were hand poured into cardboard tubes for use in commercial mining and defense applications. The initial detonation triggered “a sympathetic explosion of other explosive material stored on the main floor,” destroying the structure and scattering debris over 500 acres of rural Hickman and Humphreys counties.

Investigators have recovered roughly 1,000 pounds of undetonated material, underscoring how close the surrounding area came to an even larger catastrophe. Fourteen of the 16 victims have been identified through Rapid DNA testing; two remain unaccounted for as of this writing. Federal officials have concluded the on-site phase of their investigation, but testing and re-

testing in ATF laboratories “will not come fast,” McCracken cautioned.

Agents generated nearly 300 leads and reviewed 14,000 documents in 12 days of field work. The exact ignition source remains undetermined, but McCracken confirmed the first blast originated within a heating kettle, equipment used to maintain the explosive mixture in a molten state. As with so many industrial disasters, the question now is whether the immense quantity of volatile material stored and handled by human workers in a confined space met even minimal safety standards.

To put the scale of the Bucksnort explosion in perspective, the 28,000-pound estimated detonation surpasses the payload of the US “MOAB,” which was designed for aerial deployment against enemy fortifications.

President Trump ordered the first-ever use of the MOAB, nicknamed the “Mother of All Bombs,” on April 13, 2017, ostensibly targeting an ISIS cave complex in the Achin District of Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. The bomb killed at least 94 Afghans, though journalists and independent observers were barred from firsthand reporting from the site.

That such destructive power has now been unleashed unintentionally inside a rural Tennessee workplace speaks volumes about the militarized character of US industry. AES is a private defense contractor supplying the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and Justice, as well as NASA, under contracts reportedly worth \$140 million. The same technologies designed for imperialist war are produced under sweatshop conditions by highly exploited, underpaid laborers in one of the poorest regions of the United States.

This explosion did not occur in a vacuum. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously reported, “Accurate Energetic Systems workers raised safety concerns before the fatal Tennessee explosion,” employees described chronic understaffing, inadequate training, and pressure to meet government deadlines.

“We were told to keep the line running no matter what,” one worker recalled. Another noted that broken equipment and leaking kettles had been flagged for months without repair. The company’s privately owned parent, AAC Investments, has faced little oversight from Tennessee’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which conducted only cursory inspections in recent years.

Less than a week after the blast, a wrongful death lawsuit was filed in Humphreys County Circuit Court on behalf of the nine-year-old daughter of Jeremy Moore, one of the victims. The suit seeks \$12 million in damages, naming both AES and its parent company as defendants. Predictably, corporate and political figures have focused on “community healing” and relief funds, such as the partnership between AES and the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, while refusing to discuss the social and regulatory conditions that made the disaster inevitable.

The 16 dead, ranging in age from their early 20s to late 50s, were residents of small towns across Hickman and Humphreys counties. Families held private memorials as remains were identified, though some victims have yet to be laid to rest.

This tragedy lays bare the deadly intersection of militarism and capitalist production. In the drive to maintain US imperialist dominance abroad, corporations such as AES are handed lucrative federal contracts while cutting costs and corner-cutting on safety to maximize profit. The same government that spends \$1 trillion a year on war leaves American workers to die in unsafe factories making the very weapons used in those wars.

As the WSWS noted, “The Bucksport explosion is not an accident, it is part of the daily industrial slaughter that takes the lives of more than 5,000 workers each year in the United States.” The complicity of federal and state authorities is unmistakable: There has been no demand for criminal accountability, and Tennessee’s Republican establishment has issued only platitudes about

“resilience” and “faith.”

Similar catastrophes have marked the past several years: the Clairton Coke Works explosion near Pittsburgh (2025), the Roseland, Louisiana chemical plant blast (2025), and the Givaudan factory fire in Louisville, Kentucky (2024). Each was the result of ignored safety warnings, obsolete equipment and relentless pressure to maintain output. Like the AES tragedy, they were described by authorities as isolated “accidents,” yet all stemmed from the same underlying cause: the subordination of human life to private profit.

That 28,000 pounds of explosives were stored and handled manually by a handful of workers on a single production floor exposes the homicidal recklessness of the capitalist system. The Bucksport dead are casualties not only of an unsafe workplace but of an entire social order that values profit and war over human life.

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS call for an independent investigation, led by workers themselves, into the conditions at Accurate Energetic Systems and across the munitions industry. The corporate-government alliance that profits from militarism cannot be trusted to police itself. Workers must form rank-and-file safety committees and link their struggle with the growing opposition of workers worldwide to demand safe working conditions, full public transparency and an end to the exploitation that fuels both war abroad and death at home.

The 16 men and women who died in Bucksport will not be the last victims unless the working class organizes consciously against this system. Their memory must become a rallying point in the fight for socialism, which alone can end the needless sacrifice of lives on the altar of profit and imperialist war.



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