

Industrial slaughter in Washington: 1 dead, 9 missing after chemical tank implosion at paper mill

Jacob Crosse
26 May 2026

At least one worker was killed, nine others remained missing and nine people, including a firefighter, were injured Tuesday morning after a massive chemical tank ruptured and imploded at the Nippon Dynawave Packaging paper mill in Longview, Washington.

Officials had not released the name of the person killed or the identities of the nine still missing as of Tuesday evening, pending notification of relatives. The number of confirmed dead could rise, as emergency crews were forced to suspend search efforts because of unsafe conditions around the ruptured chemical tank.

The preventable disaster occurred at roughly 7:15 a.m. at the mill, located in an industrial zone along the Columbia River. Longview, a city of about 38,000 people north of Portland, Oregon, has long been bound up with the region's paper, lumber and shipping industries. The Nippon Dynawave facility is one of several industrial operations situated along the river, which is used to transport goods and raw materials out of the region.

Cowlitz 2 Fire & Rescue Chief Scott Goldstein said the injuries ranged from mild to severe or critical. The injured were initially transported to hospitals in Longview and throughout the Portland-Vancouver area, with some later transferred elsewhere. Emergency crews halted operations Tuesday evening because of continuing safety hazards at the site but were expected to resume search and recovery efforts Wednesday. Officials said the unstable tank still contained chemical liquid, making it impossible for responders to safely reach parts of the wreckage.

Officials initially reported that the tank held 80,000 gallons but later corrected the figure to approximately 900,000 gallons. Local reports said roughly 90,000 gallons remained in the damaged and unstable structure after the rupture. The tank contained "white liquor," a caustic chemical mixture used in the kraft paper-making

process to separate cellulose fibers from wood chips and facilitate pulp production. White liquor is made primarily of sodium hydroxide and sodium sulfide and is highly corrosive and dangerous to inhale.

According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, the chemical spilled into a drainage ditch or stormwater system. The storm drain system connects to the diking system, whose pumps discharge into the Columbia River. Ecology officials said responders shut off the pumps and were assessing the environmental impact. Unlike oil, the chemical cannot simply be skimmed or collected from water, and officials said it would neutralize over time.

The disaster follows a record of safety and environmental violations at the plant. KING 5 reported that the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries cited Nippon Dynawave four times for safety violations between 2019 and 2025 and that two investigations into the company remain open. One was reportedly opened two months ago after an anonymous complaint involving a valve on a tank holding aqua ammonia, another highly corrosive chemical. Neither investigation appeared to involve the tank that ruptured Tuesday.

Federal OSHA records show that Nippon Dynawave was cited in 2021 for a "serious" violation. The penalty was only \$2,700, an amount so small as to be meaningless for a major industrial operator. AP, citing Washington L&I's online database, reported that the company has been fined a total of just \$3,400 for three health and safety violations since the start of 2021. The same report noted open safety complaints filed against the company on March 4 and May 6.

The *Seattle Times* found that over the last five years the company has been the subject of at least 19 violations of

the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) resorting to formal citations five times. Despite this record, the company has reportedly faced only \$16,000 in EPA fines, of which only \$10,000 has been paid.

In other words, nothing was done to seriously correct the safety record at the facility. The tiny fines imposed by state and federal regulators functioned not as a deterrent, but as a cost of doing business. The result is another horrific and preventable industrial disaster in which workers are killed or maimed while surrounding communities face the threat of chemical contamination.

Such conditions are not accidental. They are the expected product of a society organized around profit, in which workers' lives are expendable, and production continues under hazardous conditions so long as profits are protected. Lumber, paper and chemical facilities have long been among the most dangerous workplaces in the country. Just last month, in Searsmont, Maine, a fire at Robbins Lumber led to an explosion that killed 27-year-old firefighter Andrew Cross.

The Longview disaster also comes amid a broader series of chemical emergencies across the country. In Orange County, California, thousands of residents were forced to evacuate for days because of a chemical leak at an aerospace facility. These incidents are treated by the political establishment and corporate regulators as isolated accidents. They are, in fact, acts of social murder: the foreseeable result of forcing workers to labor under conditions in which injury, poisoning, explosion and death are built into the production process. No amount of appeals to capitalist politicians, token regulatory reforms or stronger enforcement mechanisms will alter the basic reality that workers' lives are subordinated to profit. The only way forward is for workers to organize independently of both capitalist parties and the nationalist trade union apparatuses, form rank-and-file committees and take control over safety and production into their own hands.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact