

Gas line explosion near Panhandle town of Bushland

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Three people were injured in the blast, which was reported around 1 a.m. about a mile north of Bushland. The fire was contained by 5:30 a.m., said Potter County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Roger Short.

Those injured suffered burns and were taken to Northwest Texas Hospital in Amarillo, Short said. He didn't provide details. The cause of the explosion hasn't been determined. "My home is about 20 miles something away and I could see the flames from my home, and that's substantial. The flames were huge," Short told The Associated Press.

"You could hear the roar of the flames 20 miles away."

Gas was shut off to the line and most evacuated residents were being allowed to go home by 5:30 a.m., Short said. One house was destroyed and several others were damaged, he said. "The heat onto the homes, it did a lot of damage. You could see blinds inside the homes that were melted, it was hot, it was very hot," Short said.

Bushland Middle School principal Mark Reasor said about 60 people who were evacuated took shelter at the school, but were returning home before dawn. He said classes would start one hour late.

Crews from El Paso Natural Gas and Atmos Energy were at the scene. Bushland is a town of about 1,500, located 15 miles west of Amarillo.

Next, a refinery explosion in Utah, but the same pattern of decaying equipment there, like BP Texas City:

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/705342049/2-homes-uninhabitable-from-Woods-Cross-explosion.html>

2 homes uninhabitable from Woods Cross explosion Published: Thursday, Nov. 5, 2009 12:12 a.m. MST

WOODS CROSS — Linda Wood looked over her shoulder at the five men rolling her 100-year-old upright piano down her driveway and offered a word of advice.

"It's gonna take six of you to lift it," she said, as they prepared to put the piano on a flatbed trailer.

Wood hadn't planned to move out of the home her family has lived in since January 2004. But an explosion Wednesday at the Silver Eagle Refinery a few hundred feet from her backyard left her home uninhabitable.

"The doors were blown off the hinges," Wood said. "Windows were blown out. The house was blown off the foundation."

A volunteer at Woods Cross Elementary, Wood was at the school when the blast occurred around 9:15 a.m. She said she felt the shock wave but attributed it to concrete work being done on the campus. Then she reached her heavily damaged two-story home at 2162 S. 925 West.

"I knew what happened," she said. "I saw the smoke from the refinery."

Wood's home was one of at least a dozen that were damaged, and one of two deemed uninhabitable, after hydrogen and diesel fuel leaked from a pipeline and ignited, setting off a massive explosion, according to South Davis Metro Fire Deputy Chief Jeff Bassett.

The blast was felt by people from Roy to Salt Lake, fire officials said, and caused a power bump that led other refineries in the area to shut down. Those shutdowns prompted the release of huge plumes of smoke from the facilities' flare towers when they burned off gas as part of their emergency procedures and later, when they resumed operations.

Bassett said when South Davis firefighters reached the refinery, 2355 S. 1100 West, a fire crew comprised of Silver Eagle employees already was working to put out the blaze. The fire was brought under control in about 30 minutes, he said.

"When that product explodes, it looks really dramatic, but then it's over with," Bassett said.

No one was injured by the explosion or the fire, and there were no evacuations ordered.

Dave McSwain, president of Silver Eagle Refining Inc., said all of the refinery's piping had recently been inspected by an independent contractor and meets regulatory standards. He said the facility is in a "continual process of retrofitting," and the company considers employee and community safety a priority.

"We have spent a large amount of money on the safety program at the refinery," McSwain said.

Still, Silver Eagle safety manager Dan Beecher said the Woods Cross facility has an average record over the past 10 years, when compared with other refineries along the Wasatch Front.

"There are two that have more (OSHA) violations, two that have less," Beecher said. "We fall right smack in the middle." The Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the U.S. Chemical Safety Board are both conducting investigations into Wednesday's incident.

"We've never had a circumstance like this where anything has happened to someone outside the refinery," McSwain said, declining to comment on whether Woods Cross city leaders erred in allowing homes to be built so close to the company's refining operations.

"I don't want to really grapple with the city right now," McSwain said. "There is terminology in our field where they designate things as blast zones, and I would think that probably some of these (homes) fall inside that."

McSwain said he spent the day meeting with Woods Cross city officials, South Davis fire officials and residents affected by the blast trying to "meet needs." Crews surveyed homes for damage and determined that about a dozen will need some form of repair, for which Silver Eagle has said it will pay. Accommodations for the families displaced because of damage to their homes also will be covered by the company.

Wood said she plans to stay with family members as a result of the explosion — the fifth incident at the refinery since she moved into her home almost six years ago.

"I thought the refinery was safe," she said, watching her friends and neighbors help her with the unexpected move.