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EPA lauds Monsanto's reaction to toxic spill

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SAUGET — Environmental investigators Wednesday pieced together the details of a fire and toxic gas spill last week at Monsanto Co.'s Krummrich plant in Sauget.

Will Flower, a spokesman for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency in Springfield, said the company responded well to the mishap.

"Monsanto workers acted quickly. That's important in the chemical industry because workers and the environment need to be protected. They took the matter seriously and sounded the alarm."

Sulfur dioxide was released into the air outside the plant April 8 when about 10 gallons of phosphorus pentasulfide spilled. A fire that started from the spill was quickly extinguished. No injuries were reported.

Environmental specialist Tom Powell, with the Collinsville regional office of the state EPA, said the gas apparently quickly dissipated.

Monsanto spokeswoman Andrea Smith said the company followed a set of standard procedures in dealing with the spill.

She said once the fire was under control, workers stopped the spill by closing a valve.

Smith said an alarm system in the Rush City area of East St. Louis was sounded, but she didn't know if there had been any reaction on the part of residents.

A spokeswoman for the city would not comment on whether an evacuation took place.

Flower said the company plans changes that might prevent another such accident from occurring. "The company is taking precautions to prevent future mishaps by installing a second pressure gage in a reactor vessel. This would enable workers to make sure the material in the pipe is running through properly, and prevent future mishaps."

Powell said sulfur dioxide gas in high concentrations is poisonous to humans. He said his office has not received any questions or complaints in connection with this release. "All releases, when they're in a residential area or close to a residential area, could be serious," he said.