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Officer doubts injuries after leak

By ANTHONY SMITH
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SAUGET — East St. Louis Mayor Carl E. Officer said Monday that many residents who received treatment after a chemical spill Sunday at Monsanto Co.'s W.G. Krummrich plant may not have been injured at all.

A cloud of phosphorous trichloride escaped from a storage tank at 7:35 a.m. Sunday after a pressure disc ruptured. The leak was brought under control in about 5 minutes. An investigation is continuing into what caused the disc to burst.

More than 100 people sought treatment Sunday, complaining of irritated eyes, trouble breathing and nausea.

"These numbers are pretty

doggone high for a three-gallon emission, I just find it surprising," Officer said at a press conference.

Monsanto officials were also seemed shocked by the number of people that claimed they were affected by the cloud, said spokesman Andi Smith.

"We were surprised that so many people went to the hospitals. The cloud had dissipated by 8:45, so we were surprised by the numbers we received," Smith said.

People were still seeking treatment from area hospitals as late as 8 p.m. Monday, and two hospital spokesmen said some of the cases may not be legitimate.

"The ones that came in Sunday were legit, but the ones that came in

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late (Monday), I don't know," said a nursing supervisor at Centreville Township Hospital, who refused to give her name.

Centreville Township Hospital treated approximately 80 residents, with a small number still trickling in for treatment late Monday.

St. Mary's Hospital nursing supervisor Earl Crawford said there were still people in the emergency waiting room late Monday. "They hear they might benefit, they keep coming."

He said he did not know the number of people treated Monday. About 70 were treated Sunday.

A spokesman for Gateway Community Hospital in East St. Louis said two families were treated at 7 p.m. Monday. Gateway admitted six residents for observation Sunday, and all were in satisfactory condition, the spokesman said. The Gateway spokesman would not comment on whether all the cases were legitimate.

Monsanto spokesman Andi Smith said the company hasn't decided whether it will pay the medical bills of those injured or if it will compensate residents who were caught in the vaporous cloud, Smith said.

On Sunday a spokesman said the residents would be compensated for injuries.

The company has compensated

residents after previous spills.

After the spill Sunday, the community alarm siren was sounded and the police and fire departments of East St. Louis were notified.

Smith said no evacuation was necessary, and the all-clear siren was sounded at 8:45 a.m.

The plant will be cited for a violation of Section 9A of the Environmental Protection Act by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, spokesman John Justice said.

A letter stating specific violations will be sent to the company and Monsanto will have 15 days to respond.

"They will present us with the facts of the accident and measures they feel will prevent this from happening in the future. What comes about after their response will depend on our people in Springfield," Justice said.

The Illinois attorney general's office may become involved in the case, Justice said, because of the number of spills and leaks at Monsanto in the past.

A spokesman for the attorney general's office could be reached for comment.

A spill of nearly 300 gallons of phosphorous trichloride, a component of the herbicide Lasso, occurred April 17. Over 400 people received medical treatment and Monsanto settled numerous claims.

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