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Spill spot

(Staff photo by Bill Milligan)

MONSANTO PLANT MANAGER Bill Boyle points to the spot of an April 17 incident at the plant, in which 250 gallons of phosphorous trichloride overflowed from a tank in a loading dock. At least two state agencies, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the States Attorney General's office, are currently investigating the incident. Further details relating to the investigation will appear in Wednesday's issue of the *Journal*.

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

ST. LOUIS/TUESDAY

TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 1988

State To Investigate E. St. Louis' Response To Spill

By Safir Ahmed
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The Illinois attorney general's office said Monday that it would begin an investigation into why East St. Louis officials did not implement an evacuation plan after a chemical spill Sunday at the Monsanto plant in Sauget.

The plan, adopted in 1985 after several chemical spills, calls for using Bi-State buses to take people to various shelters in the city. Instead, residents in the Rush City area on the city's south side were simply told to leave home on their own.

"We were just notifying people," said Bruce Hill, East St. Louis' fire chief. "We told people to move north on Bond Avenue."

The decision to implement the evacuation plan rests with the city's fire department. But Hill said the plan had not been invoked because the emergency "didn't last that long."

The spill occurred about 12:15 p.m. Sunday. By late afternoon, about 450 people were treated at area hospitals for eye, nose and throat irritations. The number of people seeking medical treatment subsided by early evening.

Joe Madonia, assistant attorney general, said that his office would immediately investigate the failure to implement the evacuation plan.

"I think it's a case where everything looked OK on paper," Madonia said. "But somewhere — we don't yet know where — it did not work."

Monsanto officials said Monday that the spill was the result of human error. The spill occurred when a railroad tanker was overfilled with phosphorous trichloride and 250 to 300 gallons of the chemical spilled onto the ground.

"Our normal procedures for loading a tank car require the presence of an operator at specific points of loading," Boyle said. "Our preliminary determination is that an operator was not present at the normal completion of the loading of the tank car."

Boyle said an internal investigation was continuing and might result in disciplinary action.

Several residents of the Rush City area said Monday that they had heard a siren when the chemical spill occurred but had not known what to make of it.

"I heard the siren and I thought maybe it was a tornado or something," said Lawrence Wilson, of 902 Trendly Avenue. "Even if I knew it was a spill, where am I going to go?"

Wilson said that he had simply ignored the siren. He said he had felt some burning in his eyes and nose but had not felt the need to seek medical attention.

The siren was installed by Monsanto and two other chemical companies after residents protested the lack of notification when emergencies occurred at the plants.

The Rev. Buck Jones, a longtime critic of chemical companies in the area, said that he was "extremely upset" by the manner in which the evacuation was handled.

Jones is director of Project H.O.P.E., an East St. Louis organization that provides services to poor people.

"I feel like we have been deceived and misled," Jones said. "What this tells us is that there is no evacuation plan. We want the attorney general to force the chemical companies to have evacuation plans in place."

Jones said that when people were notified, they had not known what to do or where to go.

"There was mass confusion," Jones said. "Some people were notified after the fact. Thank God it wasn't anything more serious."

Boyle, the plant's manager, said that evacuation plans were the responsibility of local fire departments. The company's responsibility is to notify local authorities when an emergency occurs, and that was done immediately on Sunday, he said.

Phosphorous trichloride is used as a "building block" to produce agricultural and water-treatment chemicals. The chemical is a volatile material that vaporizes when mixed with moisture in the air, forming a gaseous fog.

The chemical can irritate the eyes and respiratory tract. Boyle said the chemical's effects were short-term.

Tom Powell, an emergency response specialist with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, said that based on the information he had about the spill, evacuation plans should have been implemented. Local fire departments had the responsibility to call for an evacuation, he said.

Pearlie Mims, a resident, was attending a service at the New Bethlehem Baptist Church, 1906 Tudor Avenue, when the spill occurred. Mims said that she had gone to St. Mary's Hospital in East St. Louis and had been forced to wait for nearly three hours before being treated.

"My eyes still burn today, and I keep getting a headache," she said.

Madonia, the assistant attorney general, said that the environmental control division would begin an investigation immediately to find out why the city failed to evacuate people according to the plan.

Madonia also said that a suit filed by his office last year against Monsanto had been settled earlier this year. The suit had arisen out of an incident in March 1986, when some acid escaped and 16 residents were treated at hospitals.

Madonia said the company stopped production of the acids in September after a second accident and settled the suit. Monsanto paid the state $14,000 in fines to settle the suit, he said.

State attorney general plans probe after spill

By ANTHONY SMITH
News-Democrat.

The Illinois attorney general's office has joined other agencies investigating the chemical spill Sunday at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich plant in Sauget.

Phil Mueller, public information officer of the attorney general's office, said his office is looking into the accident.

"We just want to take an overall look at what happened to see if there is any action our office should take," Mueller said.

Mueller said the attorney general's office will be working with other agencies, such as the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the Emergency Service & Disaster Agency, to see whether proper procedures were followed after the spill was called to the attention of plant officials.

The IEPA's investigation into the chemical spill continued Tuesday as the agency took the first step in its enforcement procedure — a compliance inquiry letter was sent to the company, said John Justice, regional manager for IEPA's Air Pollution Control division.

Justice said, "The letter will make the plant officials come to us and explain exactly what happened and what steps have been taken to ensure it won't happen again."

At 12:15 p.m. Sunday, a tanker was overfilled, releasing 250 to 300 gallons of phosphorous trichloride into the atmosphere. The chemical reacts with moisture in the air and soil and forms a vaporous cloud. Exposure causes temporary

See MONSANTO/3B

Monsanto——

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irritation to the eyes and respiratory tract.

About 420 people were treated after exposure to the cloud, but no one was admitted to a hospital as of Tuesday. Monsanto has agreed to pay for all emergency room services.

Boyle said Monsanto has an evacuation plan for the plant's employees, but the responsibility for evacuating the surrounding cities — Cahokia, Sauget, East St. Louis, Alorton and Centreville — rests with fire departments. Monsanto must notify the cities of an emergency when it occurs, and that was done immediately, he said.

Monsanto officials and East St. Louis Fire Department officials decided to evacuate a 22-square block area in the south end of the city as a precaution.

Firefighters and residents went door to door warning residents of the spill and told them they had to leave the area until the cloud dissipated.

Fire Chief Bruce Hill could not be reached for comment.

DSW 136368

April 20, 1988 Cahokia-Dupo Herald,

DSW 136369

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Monsanto blames toxic spill on employee error

An employee, away from his post, caused the chemical spill Sunday that prompted the evacuation of about 400 residents in the Rush City area of East St. Louis.

About 300 area residents were treated for breathing difficulties and eye irritations at St. Mary's Hospital. According to a hospital spokesman, no one was admitted because injuries suffered from the incident.

The spill occured at about 12:15 p.m. when a tank car being loaded with phosporous trichloride at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich Plant in Sauget, was filled to full, and as much as 300 gallons was spilled. When the chemical mixed with moisture in the atmosphere, a vaporous cloud formed and drifted north into the residential area.

For about three hours, East St. Louis fire officials asked residents in a 22-square block area bordered on the north by Russell Avenue, on the east by 20th Street, and on the west by 15th Street, to abandon their homes.

Monsanto officials said there shouldn't be any long-term health problems caused by the chemical which is one of the ingredients in many agricultural chemicals.

Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat Tuesday, April 19, 1988

Human error led to spill, officials say

By ANTHONY SMITH
News-Democrat

SAUGET — Human error caused the chemical spill Sunday at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich Plant that sent 420 people to area hospitals, plant officials said Monday.

Bill Boyle, manager of the Krummrich plant, said an operator was not present at the completion of loading of the tank car. Between 250 and 300 gallons of phosphorous trichloride overflowed, prompting the evacuation of a 22-block square area.

Officials on Monday updated the number of people treated for eye and respiratory irritation from 300 to 420. Monsanto will cover all emergency room treatment costs, he said.

Boyle said it is too early in the investigation to say what disciplinary action will be taken against the employee.

"I've asked every department at the plant to critically review all loading, unloading, and transfer practices. Our investigation team will determine the adequacy of all practices and procedures, and we will make appropriate changes," Boyle said. "We are trying to come up with some type of redundant controls that will eliminate this procedure being contingent on one person."

Boyle said the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is still conducting an investigation into the spill.

Andi Smith, communications supervisor for the plant, said the plant has tried to mechanize the loading procedure, without success.

The siren sounded to alert residents of the spill about 12:15 p.m. Sunday, but Thelma Blaylock, publicity chairman of the East St. Louis Central City Democratic Organization, said residents were confused and didn't know they were supposed to evacuate the area.

"There have been negotiations with the city for the last six months to have a voice-activated siren system put in place that will let residents know what type emergency they are facing," Blaylock said.

Boyle praised the efforts of the East St. Louis Fire Department in evacuating area residents, but Blaylock criticized the evacuation plan.

"There is an evacuation plan on the books, but it never has been, and never will be, operational," Blaylock said. "It's there because the city has to have some type of evacuation plan."

Phosphorus trichloride reacts with the moisture normally found in the air and soil and causes temporary eye and respiratory tract irritation, Boyle said. There are no long-term effects of exposure to the chemical, he said.

DSW 136370

STLCOPCB4036334

Spill at Monsanto spurs evacuation

By ANTHONY SMITH
News-Democrat

EAST ST. LOUIS — About 300 East St. Louis residents were treated for eye irritations and breathing difficulties Sunday after a chemical spill at Monsanto's W.G. Krummrich Plant in Sauget.

The East St. Louis Fire Department evacuated the south end of East St. Louis on Sunday as a chemical cloud floated from the Monsanto plant toward the city.

Monsanto and fire department officials decided to evacuate a 22-square block area, Tom Powell, the emergency response specialist for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, said Sunday. The area was bordered on the north by Russell Avenue, the east by 20th Street and on the west by 15th Street, he said.

"About 12:15 p.m., a tank car overflowed, spilling between 250 and 300 gallons of phosporous trichloride. This is a very volatile material which forms a vapor upon mixing with the moisture in the atmosphere," said Glynn Young, manager of environmental and community relations for Monsanto.

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Security sounded the alarm immediately, Young said, and the emergency team was activated. The team diluted the chemical by flooding the tank car with water and then draining the chemicals into a collection area around the rails.

Residents were allowed to return to their homes about 3 p.m.

Residents were treated at the emergency room of St. Mary's Hospital, but no one was admitted, said Rose Lusk, the evening house supervisor of the hospital.

"We are observing one person," Lusk said. "She complained of burning eyes, but she hasn't been admitted."

"There was nothing serious, mostly respiratory

See LEAK/3A

Leak

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problems," said Alan Biggerstaff, head nurse of the emergency room.

Powell said a preliminary investigation showed the tank car had been overfilled.

"The preliminary report indicates the tank car was overfilled by 250 gallons. The chemical is highly reactive with the moisture that usually occurs in the air and soil," Powell said. "It reacted and formed a cloud of hydrogen chloride gas."

Young said the chemical won't cause any long-term health problems, but inhaling it can cause short-term respiratory problems.

"Phosporous trichloride is one of the building blocks used in agricultural chemicals. It can be an irritant to the eyes and respiratory tract. The chemical won't cause any permanent effects," Young said.

The acute effects of prolonged exposure to the chemical are coughing, wheezing, and tearing eyes, Young said. "It just makes good sense to make sure you're OK," Young said. "We're always concerned when we have a spill."

Anthony Bell, 16, of 1405 Central Ave., and James Jackson Jr., 14, of 1607 Central Ave., said they went from door to door in their neighborhood, telling people they had to leave their homes.

"A fireman was telling us to evacuate the area, so we went from house to house telling people they had to leave. The alarm went off and smoke started coming," Bell was saying as Jackson broke in.

"It was like smoke. Clouds came through our house. When we breathed it in, we started coughing," Jackson said.

Young said Monsanto would pay for the emergency treatment of those who were affected by the chemical.

"In the past, the company has paid for emergency medical service. I would assume they would pay for this also," Young said.

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