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Monsanto spill causes injuries

By ANTHONY SMITH
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SAUGET — A chemical leak at Monsanto Co.'s W.G. Krummrich plant caused 111 nearby residents to be treated at area hospitals Sunday. It was the second such leak since April.

Most people were treated and released for minor irritations, but nine people, including two pregnant women, were admitted for observation, hospital spokesmen said.

Less than three gallons of phosphorous trichloride escaped into the atmosphere at 7:35 a.m. after a pressure disc on a storage tank ruptured, said Diane Bartolanzo, a Monsanto spokesman. The disc is designed to break when two pounds of pressure are exerted against it, she said.

"The phosphorous trichloride was just being stored. There was no transfer process going on," Bartolanzo said.

An alarm sounded warning nearby residents of the leak, and the leak was under control by 7:40 a.m., five minutes after it occurred, Bartolanzo said.

The all clear was sounded at 8:45 a.m. and an investigation is being conducted to discover why the disc ruptured, she said.

Three area hospitals treated 111 people for ailments including burning eyes, nausea, headaches, shortness of breath and dizziness, spokesmen for the hospitals said.

Gateway Community Hospital in East St. Louis treated 11 people, but of that number, six were admitted to the hospital and one, a pregnant woman, was transferred to Centreville Township Hospital, where she was admitted.

Centreville Township Hospital treated 30 patients, admitting one for further observation.

Another 70 people were treated at St. Mary's Hospital in East St. Louis. Only one patient, a pregnant woman, was admitted for observation.

No plant employees were hurt, Bartolanzo said.

Willa Dean Tooks, who has lived at 1917 Russell Ave., about five blocks from the plant, for five years, said she didn't know what was happening when she heard the siren.

"Nobody came through and said anything. The fire trucks and policemen came through last time, but this time, we just saw the cloud of whatever it was and heard the siren. They (Monsanto) will either have to move or move us," Tooks said.

This is the second leakage of the chemical in the past four months.

On April 17, about 300 gallons of phosphorous trichloride, a component of the herbicide Lasso, overflowed when being loaded into a railroad tank car. It was discovered that the operator on duty wasn't present to oversee the loading of the chemical.

A 22-square block area of East St. Louis, known as Rush City, was evacuated and at least 420 people sought treatment for exposure.

Monsanto Co. paid all medical bills for anyone treated after the April spill, and Bartolanzo said they will again take care of the medical bills.

"It's our policy to compensate anyone for their inconvenience," she said.

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