100 Hospitalized After Tyson Chlorine Leak

Kurt Voight, Associated Press

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (AP) — Approximately 300 people at a Tyson Foods processing plant were evacuated and 100 sent to local hospitals after an accidental mixture of chemicals created a chlorine gas inside part of the plant Monday morning.

The workers were forced from Tyson's Berry Street plant in Springdale, company spokesman Gary Mickelson said. Those who were suffering from breathing problems and headaches were sent to one of five area hospitals, but no injuries appeared life-threatening.

Mickelson said chlorine fumes were noticed about 9:15 a.m. Monday morning in the plant's food safety section. About 600 of the plant's 1,200 workers were at work then, and 300 were affected by the gas.

A local bus company sent over buses to take some of the workers away, and hazardous materials crews were dispatched to hospitals to decontaminate people.

"Our first and foremost concern, obviously, was ensuring that our team members were evacuated," Mickelson said. "... And that those who were experiencing respiratory issues as a result of the fumes were properly treated and assessed."

After the emergency response, Tyson Foods was given back control of the processing facility. The evacuated workers who weren't sent to area hospitals with symptoms were kept in the plant's cafeteria while the company determined its next step.

"There's been monitoring in this particular area of the plant since then, and the gas has dissipated," Mickelson said. "That particular portion of the plant that was affected is not operating at this moment."

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