Freak Tornado Hits Disputed Italy Steel Plant

The Associated Press

ROME (AP) — A freak tornado struck a steel plant in southern Italy on Wednesday just days after its owners announced their intention to close what is Europe's largest steel facility.

One person was reported missing and some two dozen were injured when the tornado struck Wednesday, the ANSA news agency said, adding that the Ilva plant sustained significant damage.

The owners of the plant, which is a mainstay of the economy in the Taranto region, said Monday they would close the plant, a blow to government efforts to keep its 12,000 employees working while managers address health concerns amid reports of an elevated incidence of cancer in the area.

The announcement came after police, acting on prosecutors' warrants, sequestered recent steel products bound for the market. Ilva said the seizure violated the government's authorization to continue operations while it deals with the environmental issues, and said it would make it impossible to sell its products.

The plant's operators have said toxic fumes have been reduced, and the Environment Ministry has been overseeing efforts to clean up the plant and assess health risks.

Workers stormed the plant on Tuesday to protest the planned closure, the date of which hasn't been decided.

Premier Mario Monti plans to meet with plant executives Thursday to discuss the situation.

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