

No cause or origin, yet, for explosion and fires at Holly Industries in Acton

Second blast in eight years concerns Council and neighbours

When the cause and origin of last Thursday's explosion and fires at Acton's Holly Industries is determined by the Ontario Fire Marshall's Office, Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette has some tough questions for the company which operates the sulphur manufacturing plant on Eastern Avenue.

"I think its time to talk to Holly Industries. Two fires in eight years, and near a residential area. I think that we'll need to have a discussion when we find out what the results were," Bonnette said at Monday's Town council meeting,

adding the Acton councillors and public share concerns about the two incidents.

Asked at Council for an update, Fire Chief Brent Marshall reported that although there was a small, minor evacuation by Halton Police of three or four homes on Hillcrest Street, "no real hazardous conditions existed," and the fire was not difficult to contain.

Later, Chief Marshall said there had been a natural gas explosion in the plant, but investigators don't know if it sparked the explosion or the explosion caused the gas leak.



INVESTIGATION CONTINUES: The cleanup at Holly Industries on Eastern Avenue continued as investigators searched for the cause and origin of the explosion and fires at the sulphur refining plant. – Ted Tyler photo

On Wednesday, On-

tario Fire Marshall's Office Investigator Mike Owens said there are two fuels under consideration as the cause of the explosion which set off multiple spot fires. "One is natural gas and the other is suspended sulphur dust. It's one or the other," he said.

Owens said several items were removed from the scene for testing, including natural gas piping, sent to the Centre of Forensic Science for metallurgical testing, and some of the sulphur product in liquid, granular and pellet form. He expects the test results within eight weeks. He also said he'd heard unconfirmed

reports that the incident caused \$1.5-million damage.

In July, 2005 the Holly neighbourhood was rocked by an "undetermined" explosion when dust in a hopper caused a flash fire that spread through the plant's piping system and sections of the plant. Chief Marshall said following that incident, changes were made in the dust collection equipment, and the most recent incident was not in the same area as the first one.

Chief Marshall said the building acted as designed in the blast – the doors and silo walls blew off to allow the blast con-

cession to dissipate. He also said during the most recent Fire Department inspection, Holly Industries "met every Fire Code regulation."

Five Holly employees escaped without injury from the plant, which refines molten sulphur into granules or pellets, mainly for the tire industry.

When Acton's Ron White, owner of the neighbouring Ron's Burner Service, heard "a big bang" and saw the sky fill with smoke, he didn't think of his own safety, but ran into the building to see if everyone got out safely.

"Our service manager dialled 911 and then we ran across the rail tracks to the backdoor which was open and didn't see anybody," White said on Monday, adding he was concerned that someone might have been in the burning building.

"I went around to the front (of the building) and everyone was standing there and then the police and that showed up, so I went back to the office to work," White said. While his wife called him a "hero" emergency services officials are always concerned that an untrained citizen trying to help may end up being an additional victim.

The plant has been turned back over to company officials who are working with insurance officials.

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