

U.S.

Arkema to Ignite Additional Unstable Chemicals at Crosby, Texas Plant

Company to “proactive measures” to ignite the remaining trailers



Smoke rises from the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas, on Sept. 1. PHOTO: /ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Christopher M. Matthews

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Arkema SA said Sunday it would ignite additional unstable chemicals at its plant in Crosby, Texas, because they haven't caught fire on their own, but continue to degrade and could threaten the area.

“There is clear visual evidence that the chemicals in the trailers are degrading, but they have failed to ignite completely,” the company said in a statement. “We are concerned that, without ignition, we can't determine if the hazard has been fully eliminated.”

The company said it would use “proactive measures” to ignite the remaining trailers, which hold organic peroxides, but didn't specify how that would be done.

A spokeswoman for the company said the Harris County Fire Marshall's office would handle the ignition process but she didn't provide additional details. The company said it wouldn't pose any additional risk to the community but that a 1.5 mile evacuation zone will remain in place.

The decision to ignite the remaining chemicals follow fires throughout the week at the plant, about 25 miles northeast of Houston.

Power loss and flooding after Hurricane Harvey led to a failure of refrigeration systems used to keep the peroxides cold at the plant. As these peroxides warm, they become unstable and ignite. Several trailers caught fire on their own during the week, sending dark plumes of smoke billowing into the sky for hours.

The company had said it expected about eight other containers to do the same thing, but the company said Sunday that wasn't happening.

The plant produces a variety of organic peroxides for the chemical industry under the product name Luperox. Arkema is part of a global chemical company based in a suburb of Paris, France, and its peroxides are used to make pharmaceuticals, polystyrene cups, building material and acrylic paint.

A top executive apologized Friday for the continuing crisis, saying the company could have released information more quickly.

"I'd like to once more apologize to everyone impacted by the events at our site," said Richard Rowe, head of Arkema's North American subsidiary.

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