

U.S.

# Chemical Explosions in Crosby, Texas: What We Know

Arkema plant makes organic peroxides, which have many industrial applications



Trucks make their way through flood waters on a main road leading to the Arkema chemical plant on Wednesday. PHOTO: BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

## *A Wall Street Journal Roundup*

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Two explosions ripped through a chemicals plant near Houston early Thursday, spewing black smoke. The owner of the facility had warned that flooding and power outages from tropical storm Harvey made an explosion or fire likely. Here's what we know so far:

### **What Happened?**

Arkema Inc. said it was informed of two explosions and black smoke at its plant in Crosby, Texas, about 25 miles northeast of downtown Houston. A resident reported hearing two consecutive explosions around 2 a.m. local time, or about 3 a.m. Eastern Time.

### **Was Anyone Hurt?**

The Harris County Sheriff's Office said one of its deputies had been taken to the hospital after inhaling fumes, and nine others drove themselves there preventively. A spokesman for the department said inhaling the fumes wasn't believed to be life-threatening.

### **What Does the Plant Make?**

The plant makes organic peroxides, a family of chemical compounds used in industrial applications such as making pharmaceuticals, polystyrene cups and plates, acrylic paint and construction material. When undiluted, most organic peroxides are highly flammable and can burn rapidly and intensely, or explode, if mishandled. Many need to be kept under tight temperature control. In close contact, they can damage eyes, skins and mucous membranes in the mouth and throat.

### **Why Did It Explode?**

Flooding forced an evacuation of the plant and disrupted power and emergency backup, hobbling the refrigeration systems used to minimize the risk of an explosion. That, the company, said made it impossible for operators to prevent an explosion.

### **Who Owns The Plant?**

Arkema is based in France. The organic peroxide business is only 0.4% of its \$7.5 billion global revenue for 2016. Arkema has 19,700 employees globally, of which 3,100 are in the U.S., according to the company's annual report. The Crosby plant, which had been evacuated, has 57 employees, according to the company's website.

### **What's Next?**

First responders are setting up a staging area, from which to coordinate a response and brief the press. The company has set up a call center for concerned residents. It has said it will also stand up a claims center to deal with any property claims.

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