Four injured in explosion at MU

June 29, 2010

Columbia -- A hydrogen gas explosion inside a University of Missouri biochemistry lab injured four people on Monday, officials said.

The blast, which blew out windows and melted blinds, happened after 2 p.m. on the third floor of Schweitzer Hall on the Columbia campus.

One of the injured was admitted to University Hospital and was listed in good condition Monday evening, the university said in a statement.

Three others were treated at the hospital and released.

The explosion "is believed to have been caused by a spontaneous combustion of gases including hydrogen and nitrogen that were being used in a research experiment," the university said.

Columbia Fire Captain Eric Hartman said the explosion and resulting small fire were under investigation.

-- The Associated Press
Human error blamed in University of Missouri blast

By the CNN Wire Staff
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(CNN) -- An explosion that injured four people at a University of Missouri science lab Monday afternoon was caused by human error, authorities said.

Lab personnel failed to turn off a hydrogen tank during an experiment and the building concentration of gas eventually exploded, the Columbia Fire Department said after an initial investigation. The building's sprinkler system put out the fire.

"Glass and debris from the third floor Biochemistry Lab had rained down onto the sidewalk, courtyard and driveway to the building, fire officials said. "Seventeen third-story windows were blown out."

The injured were transported to University Hospital, officials said. Three of the victims had been released by late Monday. The fourth was being treated in the hospital's burn unit.

"The number of injuries was certainly reduced due to the campus being on summer break, with a significantly reduced number of people in and around this facility," fire officials said.
Lab Explosion at U. of Missouri at Columbia Injures 4

Four people were injured when hydrogen ignited during a laboratory experiment at the University of Missouri at Columbia, *The Columbia Tribune* reported. Three of those injured—two postdoctoral researchers and a graduate student—were treated and released. The fourth victim, who was not further identified, suffered what were described as life-threatening injuries, but was hospitalized in "good" condition. Fire officials blamed human error for the explosion, saying the researchers were unfamiliar with a warning system that should have alerted them that the gas was reaching an explosive level. The university is also investigating the accident.
COLUMBIA, Mo • A blast in a science building on the University of Missouri's flagship campus sent four students to the hospital Monday.

Chancellor Brady Deaton was outside Schweitzer Hall about four hours after a hydrogen explosion there blasted out 17 third-floor windows and sent glass flying 40 feet outside the historic biochemistry hall about 2:20 p.m.

"I'm really concerned about the victims," Deaton said. "We will be working overtime to be sure any condition that led to this will be addressed."

The explosion occurred in a lab on the third floor of the building that has been on the eastern edge of the campus since 1912. Four people - two postdoctoral students, a graduate student and another person - were injured when some of the hydrogen they were working with exploded.

"It looked as if a bomb went off in the lab," said Capt. Eric Hartman of the Columbia Fire Department.

The worst of those injured was originally said to have "life-threatening" injuries by the fire department, but that victim was later upgraded to "good condition." All four victims - who were not identified - were sent to University Hospital in Columbia.

Fire investigators attributed the blast to human error, Hartman said. Someone in the lab turned on the hydrogen supply to a piece of lab equipment but was not familiar with the warning system designed to alert when the hydrogen level got dangerously high. When the gas reached an ignition source, it exploded.

An automated sprinkler system extinguished most of the small fire triggered by the blast; Columbia firefighters put out the rest. Hartman said the building did not appear to sustain any structural damage.

Student Erin Bucko, 21, of Columbia, was one building away. Her class jumped when they heard the explosion and then ran to the windows to see smoke pouring out of Schweitzer Hall. "It was really scary for us," Bucko said. "Automatically, your heart just kind of stops."
Explosion at MU injures four, damages Schweitzer Hall

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS and MEREDITH RODRIGUEZ

An explosion at the University of Missouri on Monday afternoon injured four people and damaged Schweitzer Hall.

University officials said the four people injured, none critically, were taken to University Hospital. One person was admitted and was in good condition Monday night.

That person took the brunt of the explosion, suffering impact to the face and chest along with burns, said Capt. Eric Hartman of the Columbia Fire Department.

The names of the injured were not released.

The explosion about 2:20 p.m. blew out 17 windows on the building’s third floor, which houses chemistry and biochemistry labs, university officials reported.

Hartman said the hydrogen exploded because of human error during a research experiment in which it was mixed with nitrogen.

Because lab personnel weren’t familiar with the warning system to alert that the hydrogen was reaching explosive limits, the gas was left on, Hartman said in a statement.

“Once the gas reached an ignition source, it ignited and the explosion occurred,” he said.

The 2,000-pound hydrogen tank cylinder feeding into the anaerobic hood where the explosion occurred did not explode, as was initially reported.

The building was occupied at the time of the explosion and was evacuated.

The interior of the biotech laboratory where the explosion occurred was destroyed, and an adjacent lab also suffered major damage, including water damage, said Mary Jo Banken, a university spokeswoman.
'Human error' blamed in Schweitzer Hall blast
Two post-doctoral students, one graduate student among injured.

Columbia Fire Department investigators determined that "human error" was to blame for an explosion Monday afternoon in a third-floor biochemistry lab in Schweitzer Hall on the University of Missouri campus.

By JANESSE SILVEY
Published June 28, 2010 at 3:07 p.m.
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Four people were injured Monday after gas from a 2,000-psi hydrogen tank ignited on the third floor of Schweitzer Hall on the University of Missouri campus. Columbia fire investigators said Monday night that the explosion was caused by "human error" during an experiment in a biochemistry lab.

The Columbia Fire Department responded to the building at 503 S. College Ave. at 2:20 p.m. for a report of a structure fire. When they arrived, they saw signs of an explosion, Capt. Eric Hartman said.

"Glass and debris from the third floor Biochemistry Lab had rained down onto the sidewalk, courtyard, and driveway to the building," Hartman said in a statement released at 10 p.m. Monday. Seventeen third-story windows were blown out.
Crews went up to the lab and found a small fire, which they quickly extinguished. "Most of the fire had been extinguished by the automatic sprinkler system which had been activated by the explosion," the statement said.

Fire crews found four injured victims. One had life-threatening injuries, two had moderate injuries and one had minor injuries. Among them were two post-doctoral students and one graduate student. The fourth person, who was working with the lab's hood, suffered the life-threatening injury. Hartman said as of Monday night he was unsure if that person was faculty or a student.

All four were transported to University Hospital. Their injuries ranged from "impact" and "shrapnel" type injuries to burns and respiratory distress, the statement said.

As of 10 p.m. Monday, three of the victims had been released from the hospital. The fourth was admitted to the burn unit, and his or her condition was upgraded to "good," the statement said.

Hartman said the hydrogen tank is intact. Columbia fire investigators determined the cause of the explosion to be "human error during an experimental process."

"Lab personnel turned on the hydrogen tank supply to an anaerobic hood, and due to not being familiar with the warning systems designed to alert them when the hydrogen level was approaching explosive limits, the gas was left on," the statement said. "Once the gas reached an ignition source, it ignited and the explosion occurred."

Hartman said the University of Missouri is conducting additional investigations "to determine what additional steps should be taken to avoid a similar incident." He said the university will be releasing the victims' names.

The lab was used by Professor Judy Wall, MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken confirmed this afternoon. Wall was in her office across from the lab and was not injured in the blast.

Schweitzer Hall is home to the Department of Biochemistry, which is part of the School of Medicine and the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Built in 1912, the building is named after Paul Schweitzer, the first full-time professor of Chemistry and the chairman of the Department of Agricultural Chemistry, according to the MU website.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilveyn@columbiatribune.com.
A lab explosion blew out the windows of Schweitzer Hall on Monday afternoon. The explosion injured four people, one critically.

KATIE CURRID
BY MISSOURIAN STAFF

COLUMBIA — Four people were injured when a lab device on the third floor of MU's Schweitzer Hall at 503 S. College Ave. exploded Monday afternoon.

"Certainly this was an accidental explosion, but the lab looks like a bomb went off," said Columbia Fire Department Capt. Eric Hartman, who was on the scene.

In a news release, Hartman said the explosion was caused by human error in operating an anaerobic hood — an oxygen-free chamber used for working with bacteria that can't survive in oxygen. Hartman said lab personnel ignored a "warning system" designed to tell researchers when too much hydrogen enters the chamber and becomes flammable. An explosion resulted when the gas came into contact with an ignition source, the release said.
A 2,000 pounds per square inch hydrogen tank did not explode, as first reported. Investigators said it remained intact.

The lab technician working with the anaerobic hood suffered a life-threatening impact injury to the chest in addition to burns, Hartman said. That person was transferred to University Hospital by ambulance after the explosion, as were two others with moderate injuries; the fourth person with minor injuries was transferred to the hospital via a "private vehicle," Hartman said.

One person suffered difficulty breathing related to asthma, Hartman said. The four suffered various impact and shrapnel injuries in addition to burns.

As of 5:45 p.m., according to an MU News Bureau release, three of those injured had been treated and released. The fourth person remained in the hospital and was listed as being in good condition. The bureau did not specify which of four injured people remained in the hospital.

Hartman said one graduate student and two postdoctoral students were among the people injured in the explosion. Both the fire department and the University of Missouri Police Department declined the release their names, referring reporters to the university. MU spokesman Christian Basi said he did not have the names and didn't know when they would be made available.

Hartman said the number of injuries was "certainly reduced" because of MU being on summer break, which meant fewer people working in the facility.

The lab belongs to MU biochemistry professor Judy Wall, Basi said. Wall could not be reached for comment.

Wall's lab was used for experiments with bacteria. Hartman said he was unsure whether the 2,000 psi hydrogen tank was being used at the time of the explosion. He said the department is taking precautions against any potentially hazardous chemicals. He said the ceiling in the lab collapsed but that the building remained structurally sound.

After the explosion, the building was evacuated, and Hartman said the fire was contained in about 10 minutes. Fire crews then began working to ventilate chemicals. The fire alarm was triggered and the building's fire sprinklers activated, extinguishing most of the fire, Hartman said in a release.
The building's central staff were allowed to re-enter the building, Hartman said at around 4:15 p.m.

Seventeen windows were blown out in the third-floor explosion. The room's number was not yet available.

Phil Leibu was working in the basement of Schweitzer Hall when he heard an explosion and saw debris falling on the ground through his window.

Jeanie Phipps, an administrative assistant in Mumford Hall, said she heard a loud boom.

"I didn't really look. I thought it was something with a truck," she said, citing the heavy roadwork on campus.

She received an e-mail alert about the explosion and went outside to see what was going on. Several small groups of people were watching the scene while the fire department was investigating, she said.

There was significant damage to the building with glass and debris falling to the ground, Hartman said. All the windows on one corner of the building were broken.

Basi said no one other than the fire department would be allowed to access the lab until further notice, and cleanup in the lab would start later Monday night.

While the ignition source of the explosion in Schweitzer Hall is unknown, explosions in anaerobic chambers are not unprecedented, according to a research paper written by Mike Cox of Anaerobe Systems in San Jose, Calif. Cox — who previously experienced two small anaerobic chamber explosions — wrote that when a chamber is transitioning to an oxygen-free state, specific combinations of oxygen and hydrogen can become flammable, making an explosion possible if something ignites the gas.

MU is expected to investigate the explosion and take steps to avoid a future incident, the fire department said in its release.
COLUMBIA — The University of Missouri System announced the hirings of a new secretary and interim chief of staff Monday. Both will assume their new positions July 1.

The Board of Curators appointed Cindy S. Harmon board secretary. Harmon will support the activities of the nine curators, who serve as the governing body for the four campuses of the UM system. Her responsibilities will include:

- new curator orientation
- record keeping and management
- preparation of meetings and travel planning
- serving as board liaison to the system president, officers, faculty, staff and constituents
- directing the operations of the board office

Harmon received a bachelor's from Columbia College and previously worked as a business operations manager at Missouri Employers Mutual Insurance in Columbia. She has more than 15 years of experience in projects and executive-level office management in the education, health care and insurance industries. She also worked for the UM Development Office and as a medical student/residency program coordinator and assistant manager for the obstetrics and gynecology department at University of Missouri Health Care.

Kathy Miller will become the interim chief of staff after serving as board secretary for nearly 15 years. Her responsibilities will include the coordination of media requests for information under the provisions of the Missouri Sunshine Law.
Frank Coluccio won’t be going in to work on Wednesday morning. The 47-year-old telecommunications specialist anticipates he’ll have a wild Tuesday night and will need some time to recover.

His evening plans? He’s heading to a local movie theatre with hordes of other fans to watch The Twilight Saga: Eclipse, the latest film in the wildly popular vampire series based on books by Stephenie Meyer.

“My daughter loves it, my wife tolerates it, my son thinks it’s kind of creepy.” — Frank Coluccio

There are the screaming tweens, the bloodsucker-smitten moms and a contingent of gay male followers. But Mr. Coluccio is a member of the Twilight franchise’s most unlikely fan base — he’s a Twi-Dad.

At first Mr. Coluccio, an avid volleyball fan whose other favourite books include Ann Coulter’s and Sean Hannity’s offerings, didn’t understand why his daughter, son and wife were interested in the series.

“I thought it was another vampire story: Girl meets vampire, vampire falls in love with girl, vampire destroys girl. The end,” Mr. Coluccio says. Then, one day he was driving his daughter and niece to the theatre to see the first Twilight film, and he opted to watch it with them instead of walking around the mall for a few hours.

He liked it, and then gave the first novel a chance. “When I read the book I was like, ‘Whoa! Wow! Wow!’ ” he says.

He devoured the series’ other three books in just a few days.

“It’s funny at times, it’s heartbreaking at others. It’s just such a good story. It’s a good escape.”
Mr. Coluccio has travelled to fan events and conventions in Seattle, Vancouver and Forks, Wash. In Seattle, he became a minor celebrity when he won three rounds of the Twilight trivia challenge. Last year, he dyed his hair light blonde to resemble Carlisle Cullen, one of the characters from the series.

He has yet to meet a fellow Twi-dad, though.

"[My friends say] ‘You gonna march in a gay parade now? Are you Team Edward or Team Jacob?’ ” he says. “The ribbing was there. But I couldn’t care less – it’s something I like.”

The Coluccio family is split on its patriarch’s obsession. “My daughter loves it, my wife tolerates it, my son thinks it’s kind of creepy,” Mr. Coluccio says. “But here’s the deal: My son’s girlfriend and his female friends think it’s great.”

Washington, D.C. math philosopher and fellow Twi-Dad Doug Auclair has had the same problems.

His fandom has won him points with the teen daughters of a family friend, but his wife doesn’t quite understand the appeal of the series. He persuaded her to read the series, which she dismissed as books about “angsty teens.”

Mr. Auclair told her he only saw the first film twice but, he confesses, “I saw Twilight the movie 11 times ... I skipped work, I took lunch breaks.”

He’s so enamoured with the story of Bella, Edward and the rest of the pale-faced crew that he writes Twilight fan fiction.

“Instead of writing it like a guy would write about it, I would write about the menstrual flow and the feelings that arise at that time,” he says.

His readers often don’t believe he’s a 43-year-old father of two, he adds. “A few times I got private messages from readers saying, ‘You’re a girl and you’re 20. You just say you’re a dad because you want to go to a niche market.’”

It may become easier for Twi-Dads to openly enjoy the series when the third film hits theatres — at least that’s the hope of the folks who are marketing it.

A team of University of Missouri communications professors published Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise this week in which they argue that Summit Entertainment is trying to attract a male audience for its third film by selling it as an action flick in trailers.

“Why is Summit doing this? From a cultural point of view, the media industry doesn’t confer cultural legitimacy on texts until they are embraced by men, not just women,” Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, one of the book’s co-authors, said in a release.
Even if that strategy fails, there will still be many males in theatres this week who have been dragged by their children or significant others or are pre-screening it for their kids.

When the previous instalment *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* hit theatres, a group of daddy bloggers took on the challenge of reading the books or watching the films as part of the “Twilight Dad Blogger Experiment” to assess whether they were appropriate for their daughters.

The great takeaway for some? The pro-abstinence message. Ron Mattocks, a stay-at-home dad in Houston, Tex., says, “That’s the one lone good thing that I’ve pointed out about the story.”

He sat through both movies with his wife, but isn’t quite ready to read the books.

Still, he’s won some serious cool points with his step-daughters for knowing plotlines and character names.

“The other part of me watching it was so that I could be familiar with it because the girls end up talking about it so much,” he says. “I try to be hip.”

Mr. Coluccio sees that benefit too. “As parents grow up and kids grow up, they tend to drift apart. Especially girls and their dads. But the Twilight phenomenon has really brought us together.”