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Monday, Oct 18, 2004



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Posted on Sat, Oct. 16, 2004

Officials say chemical warehouse fire was accidental

Associated Press

CONYERS, Ga. - A massive warehouse fire that sent a cloud of chlorine-tinged smoke into the air and prompted the evacuation of hundreds of homes is believed to have been started accidentally, according to the results of the fire investigation.

Rockdale County and the Georgia Fire Marshall's Office officials concluded the May 25 BioLab blaze was not intentionally set, although they could not determine the fire's exact cause, according to a report released Friday.

BioLab is a manufacturer of pool and spa products.

Capt. Phil Norton, chief investigator with the Rockdale County Fire Department, noted in the report that the fire destroyed much of the physical evidence and hindered investigators in determining the cause of the fire.

Norton reported that the investigation into the BioLab fire in Conyers was closed "unless new information or evidence comes to light."

Arson investigators were called to the scene on May 26 and begin interviewing workers and supervisors. At that time, the site was deemed unsafe with chemicals still burning under the buildings collapsed roof.

Investigators soon believed the fire was not intentionally set and considered several scenarios during their investigation. In a draft synopsis included in the report, Norton, along with state fire investigators, considered that the fire may have been the result of a reaction caused by spilled chemicals.

The scenario was based on an interview with a worker who was at the BioLab warehouse the morning of the fire. The worker said there was a spill of an unidentified chemical from a forklift that was not investigated by a supervisor, according to the report.

However, the final report did not include details of the workers allegations, only alluding to it briefly and stating that on June 1 "We had an employee come forth with information about some events that took place the night of the fire that could have possibly contributed to the origin of the fire."

Rockdale County Fire Chief Henry Argo said the investigators could not verify the worker's statements.

"Because of the destruction of the scene, and this being only one person's statement, we

Columbus ↑80 ↓60
Macon ↑80 ↓60
Washington ↑64 ↓55

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were unable to collaborate," Argo said. "The standard you have to meet to be able to prove something just wasn't met."

The fire began in the early morning hours on May 25 in a BioLab warehouse where chemicals were stored before being shipped. Conyers and surrounding areas were closed off for two days and traffic on Interstate 20 was rerouted.

Information from: The Rockdale Citizen, <http://www.citizenonline.net/>



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