

Anhydrous theft leads to leak in Lisbon

Authorities are looking for at least two people who tried to steal liquid fertilizer (anhydrous ammonia) from a tank to make methamphetamine, causing a leak that released a dangerous cloud over the the City of Lisbon. Residents were forced to stay in their homes for several hours and a newspaper carrier was treated and released, and hundreds of pounds of food from the grocery store had to be destroyed.

One person was taken to the hospital for decontamination and examination.

The leak was reported at 4:36am when a man driving to work in Gwinner saw a plume on the ground along ND Highway 32. An alert was broadcast over KQLX radio station, telling residents to remain inside and to seal their doors and windows to prevent exposure to the gas, which irritates eyes and the respiratory system. Emergency notifications on National Weather Radio was also broadcast.

The fire department set up a water mist to draw down the ammonia and the local hospital was notified and in lock down. They had done decontamination on one individual.

Lisbon Police Chief, Jeanette Persons said, It was definitely a criminal act. We have no suspects, but I would say there would have to be at least a minimum of two people involved in this. If it would have happened in the afternoon when the town is buzzing, and there would have been a north wind, we would have had a major catastrophe on our hands.

The tank at the Farmers Union Oil Company leaked about 350 gallons of the liquid fertilizer early Sunday, causing an enormous white cloud that hung over the south side of the city for several hours, Persons said.

Lisbon and law officers went door to door, warning residents to stay indoors. An apartment complex was evacuated. The North Dakota Veterans Home was also put on alert. Traffic control was implemented in and out of the city. Two businesses on the south end of town, Alco, a variety store, and Lisbon Super Valu, were closed for most of Sunday. The grocery store manager, Jay Hinkmeyer, said hundreds of pounds of produce had to be thrown away at the urging of state Health Department officials. We were right in the path of the cloud, said Hinkmeyer.

Farmers Union Oil Co. manager, Don Olson, said, Apparently we got a meth dealer in the area who decided he needed some anhydrous. Olson said the thieves tried to get the anhydrous by siphoning it from one tank into another tank. They used a hose and duct tape between the tanks, and when the pressure built up, it just blew the hose and the duct tape off. At that point, apparently, they just took off. Olson said the valve on the tank was left open, and the smaller tank and hose were left behind.

Olson said he is reviewing security measures for the anhydrous at his company.

All surrounding hospitals have been notified to be on alert for victims with symptoms of anhydrous exposure. Hospitals were also asked to report patients with these symptoms to the Lisbon Police Department.

The Lisbon Police Department, Ransom County Sheriff s Dept, North Dakota State Patrol, Ransom County Fire Department, Ransom County Emergency Management, National Weather Service, KQLX Radio, North Dakota Health Department and the Bureau of Criminal Investigation have all been working on the case.

About the Author

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