1 Dead, Several Hurt In NE Miss. Plant Explosion

FULTON, Miss. (AP) — One person was killed and others injured in an explosion Wednesday at a copper tubing plant in northeast Mississippi, emergency officials said.

Itawamba County Coroner Steven McNeece says Phillip Cason Hosch, 29, of Sulligent, Ala., died in the blast that happened about 4 p.m. at Mueller Copper Tube in Fulton. McNeese did not have other details.

Itawamba County Sheriff Chris Dickinson told WTVA-TV in nearby Tupelo that a medical helicopter and ambulances were sent. It's unclear how many were hurt, though some were sent to a nearby hospital, McNeece said.

An official with Mueller Industries said the company is still assessing the damage. Authorities were unsure how the explosion happened.

Rhonda Thomas, who lives in a subdivision near the plant, told the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal in Tupelo that she heard what sounded "like dynamite exploding." When she and her husband, David, ran outside to see what had happened, "the sky was covered with black smoke," she said.

The plant was evacuated after the blast and the fire extinguished about an hour later.

The Itawamba County Sheriff's Department and the Greater Fulton Fire Department did not immediately provide any other details to The Associated Press late Wednesday.

Officials said a Hazmat team decontaminated people who had chemicals on them. McNeece said an autopsy on Hosch was planned for Thursday in Jackson. Sulligent, Ala., is about 30 miles from Fulton.

Memphis, Tenn.-based Mueller Industries makes copper tube and fittings, among other products. The company also has plants in Arkansas, Tennessee, California, Florida, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Mueller is also located in Canada, Mexico and Great Britain.

The company has four plants — Mueller Copper Tube, Mueller Casting, Mueller Copper Fittings and Mueller Custom Pack — on the same road in Fulton. Mueller Copper Tube is the oldest and largest of four plants in the complex.

The company's Fulton operation opened in 1969 and employs 300 to 400

employees.

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