Refinery Explosion Leaves One Dead, One Injured

KEN MILLER,Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A boiler that was being brought back online after maintenance exploded at an oil refinery in Wynnewood, killing one worker and injuring another, Garvin County's sheriff said Saturday.

Billy Smith, 34, of Pauls Valley, died in the blast at the refinery on Friday evening and Russell Mann of Davis was hospitalized with undisclosed injuries, Sheriff Larry Rhodes said. Both were employees of the CVR Energy Inc.-owned plant, Rhodes said.

An official with Sugar Land, Texas-based CVR said Saturday that the company had no comment beyond a statement released Friday expressing sympathy to the families of the employees and saying it was assessing the situation.

The explosion occurred after the plant had been shut down earlier in the week for planned maintenance, a 40-day process called a turnaround, according to Rhodes. "There is no crude oil refining going on right now," he said.

The sheriff said the boiler had undergone maintenance work just before the blast.

"As they were working to bring that unit back up, or back online, that's when a small explosion occurred," he said. "I do know there was no fire; it was more of a blast of the gasses and the pressures that built up within that unit."

Rhodes said the investigation into the cause of the explosion will be turned over to CVR and federal safety officials.

He did not know how many workers were at the refinery at the time of the explosion, but said there are up to 2,000 employees there at various times throughout the day, a number that he said includes contractors working on the maintenance project.

A portion of State Highway 17A and Highway 77 were shut down for nearly two hours after the explosion, according to the Oklahoma Highway Patrol.

CVR acquired the refinery when it purchased Gary-Williams Energy Corporation in 2011, according to the company's website. The refinery has a daily capacity of 70,000 barrels of crude and produces gasoline, diesel fuel, military jet fuel, solvents and asphalt.

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