

GAS: Explosion forced residents within a mile to evacuate homes

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The Plymouth facility — located across the Columbia River from Umatilla — is used for storing of natural gas off the main Northwest pipeline. Gas is cooled into a liquid state at minus 260 degrees Fahrenheit, and held in the identical tanks until needed elsewhere throughout the region. Both tanks are capable of holding up to 14 million gallons of material.

With approximately 3,900 miles of transmission pipe, the Williams Northwest Pipeline is the main artery for carrying natural gas through Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado.

Last year's explosion forced residents living within a mile of the facility to evacuate their homes for more than a day while emergency responders dealt with the threat of leaking natural gas. Five employees were treated for injuries, including one who was sent to a Portland hospital with burns.

An investigation into the incident is now being led by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. Their findings will be made public once all the information is gathered, Swaner said.

It is not yet known whether the incident was accidental or caused by employee error. Based on those findings, Swaner said the company will take a closer look at procedures to see how they can avoid a similar event in the future.

"Until we really understand what happened at the facility, we don't want to talk about procedures," she said.

Company officials held a public meeting in Plymouth a week after the explosion, and Swaner said they hope to return by spring or summer with more information to share with the community. Prior to the blast, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission last inspected the Plymouth facility in November 2013 and reported no violations.

Swaner said the company takes safety very seriously, although they dealt with a number of dangerous mishaps in 2014. Those included Plymouth, a pipeline explosion in West Virginia and gas plant explosion in Opal, Wyoming.

"These are things we don't want to happen," Swaner said. "We do look at our safety record, but we have to understand why we're having these incidents."

Williams Northwest filed notification with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on July 2, 2014, of its plans to repair the Plymouth facility in three phases. Most structures have already been repaired, and Swaner said employees are back to work.

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FIRE: Kids are unharmed physically

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get the smell out with repeated washings.

"We're slowly going through things," she said. "We're kind of taking it one day at a time."

She said the kids are unharmed physically but "broke down" yesterday and have been drawing lots of pictures of the fire.

Bursell said she has been touched by the kindness of people in both Hermiston and Umatilla, where her parents live. The manager of McNary Market gave her \$20 for gauze and put out a can to collect donations for the family, and another community member has already offered up a bed to replace the one that burned.

She said if anyone wants to drop off clothes or bedding for Izabel, 7, or Rowmin, 5, or herself they can do so at her parents' house, 218 Wenatchee St. in McNary.

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DEPOT: Locals want the property on the tax rolls

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play games here or hardball, but I don't think we've got the votes on this board of directors to do profit sharing or something in that line," he said to emphatic nods from several board members.

Chance said Umatilla County, Morrow County, the Port of Morrow, the Port of Umatilla and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation had pulled together the authority because they thought they stood "the best chance to move this property." But if the Army wanted to take on that role instead, he said, the important thing to the local entities was to get the property on the tax rolls and generate jobs.

"We don't care who does that," he said.

The news of the Army's reversal came as a bump in the road right as the authority discussed a contract awarded to Ferguson Engineering and Surveying out of John Day to survey the property. It also approved opening a bank account to handle money from subleases such as the \$8,000 from an unspecified agricultural user for 40 acres of land and a \$20,000 sublease with Walla Walla Foundry for storage space in 20 concrete igloos.

The authority had to put on hold a discussion on hiring an executive director as the next step from Chance's position as project manager. If the deal with the Army falls

apart, Chance said, then the authority doesn't need to hire an executive director to handle land transactions after all.

Chance said he was still hopeful the authority and the Army could come to an agreement. The Port of Morrow had expressed interest in buying about 600 acres outside the fence, he said, which could be enough to mollify the higher-ups at the Department of Defense. Ultimately the Army could decide it wasn't worth the hassle to sell the property.

"We're in the negotiation process. We'll just have to see where this comes down," he said. "They would like to get rid of the acreage and they would like to do it cleanly and just be done with it."

CHIEF: City pays the position \$64,550 a year plus benefits

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Pilot Rock budget records show the city pays the chief position \$64,550 a year plus benefits. That's about \$40,000 less than what the cities of Milton-Freewater, Pendleton and Hermiston each pay their police chiefs. And police in small communities can feel like they are on call 24-7, Carnes said, and have zero private time.

The Pilot Rock City Council also will consider a proposal from the telecommunication company Unison, which wants to purchase a cell tower franchise in Pilot Rock for the next 50 years for a total of

\$750,000. Steve Draper, the city's public works director, in a memo to the council has recommended turning down the offer. The city makes about \$1,100 a month from U.S. Cellular for one tower and almost \$3,400 a month from American Tower in a second deal, Draper reported, and those agreements increase rent every five years. He argued the city makes "substantial revenue" from those towers, and the city would stand to lose more than \$380,000 on the Unison deal.

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