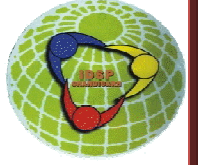




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Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

Alert ID	Publication Date	Reporting Date	Place Name	News Source/Publication Language
5895	08.05.2020	08.05.2020	Visakhapatnam Andhra Pradesh	www.indianexpress.com/English https://indianexpress.com/article/india/vizag-gas-leak-deaths-6399439/
Title:	At least 10 people were killed and nearly 350 hospitalised after gas leaked from a chemical factory on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU- Visakhapatnam , SSU- Andhra Pradesh			

At least 10 people were killed and nearly 350 hospitalised after gas leaked from a chemical factory on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh in the wee hours of Thursday, while it was being prepared for reopening after the easing of the lockdown.

At least 2,000 people in five villages located in a 5-km radius around the factory owned by the multinational LG Chem were affected, with several falling unconscious with breathing difficulties. Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner Rajiv Kumar Meena said at least two people died accidentally, one falling into a well and another off a two-storey building, as they tried to escape the pungent-smelling styrene gas. "Officials evacuated the villages once it was ascertained that the gas was non-poisonous. All the people admitted in hospitals are stable," he said.

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**Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,
Ministry Of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India**

22-Sham Nath Marg, Delhi – 110 054

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The LG factory, a polymers manufacturing unit located 15 km from Visakhapatnam, was set to reopen on Thursday and around 20 workers were preparing for it when the gas started leaking. PTI reported sources as saying that the moment the gas leaked, the workers followed an established protocol and were not among those affected.

The dead included two children. While over 1,000 people were brought to various hospitals, only 346 remained admitted by evening, of whom 20 required ventilator support. The gas leak has not been fully plugged yet.

Originally established in 1961 as Hindustan Polymers to manufacture polystyrene, the factory was taken over by South Korea-based LG Chem in 1997, which renamed it as LG Polymers Limited. The factory manufactures general-purpose, high-impact and expandable polystyrene, as well as engineering plastics compounds, and employs around 300 people.

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, who rushed to Visakhapatnam and met some of those hospitalised, questioned why the alarms in the factory had not gone off when the gas leaked. An FIR has been registered against the factory and an inquiry started.

Industries Minister M Goutham Reddy said guidelines have been issued to all industries regarding safe reopening of factories. "Our initial information is that workers were checking a gas storage tank when it started leaking."

The officials struggled to contain the gas leak for nearly four hours. Visakhapatnam Collector V Vinay Chand said all the five villages had been evacuated. "The situation was very serious till 6 am as the gas leaked till then. Now, it has eased a bit and we are able to go into the affected villages. A large number of animals, including pet dogs, livestock and birds, have died."

LG said the leak had been noticed by company staff who were inspecting machines to restart the factory, and that they had raised an alarm. It said none of its employees were among the dead, and that it was cooperating with Indian authorities to help the residents and its employees. "The gas leakage is now under control. We are investigating the extent of damage and the exact cause of the leak and deaths," it said in a statement.

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The people living in nearby areas first realised what was happening when police vans went around the area at about 3 am, sounding sirens and asking people to come out. Officers said they had to break into many homes as the residents were either fast asleep or may have fainted due to the gas.

A villager talked about waking up to cries for help. Visuals of people gasping for breath as they staggered to safety, of parents carrying unconscious children, and of several fainting, evoked memories of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy and led to panic.

Police and NDRF teams rescued the factory workers. A team from the naval base in Visakhapatnam also helped with the rescue, bringing 50 breathing apparatuses. Apart from breathing trouble, people complained of rashes and burning eyes. Officials said that due to Covid-19 preparations, dozens of ambulances and ventilators were readily available.

With the gas still not fully dispersed, the evacuees may not be able to return home for two more days. A defusing material is being transported from Gujarat.

The gas leak also impacted the movement of trains from Visakhapatnam, including at least nine Shramik Special Trains taking migrants to various places. Staff at SCMN Station in the city experienced burning in the eyes and suffocation. Train movement was stopped across SCMN from 8.35 am to 12 noon.

Explained | What is styrene gas?

Sagar, a local registered medical practitioner, said a large number of children were affected. Several police personnel, who were part of the rescue operation, also complained of breathlessness and irritation in eyes, and some fainted.

The Andhra government has announced ex-gratia of Rs 1 crore each for families of the deceased, besides a compensation package for those affected and those who have lost livestock.

The Centre has decided to dispatch a CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) Emergency Team of the NDRF from Pune, which specialises in handling chemical disasters.

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The decision was taken at a meeting held by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take stock of the situation. The PM also tweeted about the incident, saying he was praying for everyone's safety.

NDRF Director General S N Pradhan said: "The situation has been controlled and the silo is leaking very little now. We will be there till it is completely stopped." He added, "Styrene gas is heavier than air and settles with water. So water is being sprayed. The gas intensity too has come down."

Asked if the Centre will issue some guidelines for factories opening after the lockdown, the NDMA said detailed and clear guidelines on chemical safety are already available and there was no need for fresh directives.

AIIMS Director Dr Randeep Guleria, who was present at the NDMA press briefing on Thursday, said there was no antidote to styrene, also known as ethenylbenzene and vinylbenzene, and the treatment was largely supportive. "It can cause harm through inhalation, leading to irritation of eyes, throat and breathing difficulty. In case of high inhalation, it can cause headache, dizziness and even coma. In certain cases it can be fatal," he said.

Dr Guleria also said the gas would not leave any long-term impact. "This compound gets metabolised quickly and goes out of the system. Currently, most people are stable and will hopefully make a good recovery."

The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation put out an advisory on Twitter, asking people to wear a wet cloth or mask around their nose, eat banana and jaggery and drink milk to neutralise the effects of the gas.

(ENS inputs from Delhi, PTI inputs from Visakhapatnam)

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