

Deaths Reported in Animal Feed Plant Blast

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Firefighters stage outside the International Nutrition plant in Omaha, Neb., Monday, where a fire and explosion took place Monday, Jan. 20, 2014. Two people were killed and 10 others were seriously injured, authorities said. (AP Photo/Nati Harnik)

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — An explosion that brought down part of an animal feed processing plant in Omaha on Monday morning killed 2 people and seriously injured 10 others, authorities said.

The search for bodies in the crippled International Nutrition plant progressed slowly Monday and had to be suspended in the evening. Omaha Police Lt. Darci Tierney said all 38 of the workers who were in the building at the time had been accounted for, so the death toll wasn't expected to grow.

Through much of the day, authorities declined to say how many died while they sorted out what happened. In total, officials said two died, 10 were hospitalized and seven were hurt but refused treatment. The other 19 workers escaped.

Authorities said late Monday that Keith Everett, 53, of Omaha, was one of the victims. The other victim's name hasn't been released.

Search-and-rescue experts worked into Monday evening to stabilize the building and removed one victim.

But the combination of strong winds, cold temperatures and a dangerous building forced rescuers to suspend operations before the second victim could be recovered, Omaha Interim Fire Chief Bernie Kanger said.

That search effort and investigation will resume Tuesday morning, but there's

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difficult work ahead.

"We've got tens of thousands of pounds of concrete, reinforced concrete and steel," Kanger said. "This is a very significant rescue operation."

Authorities don't know what caused the blast, but Kanger noted that there were no hazardous chemicals at the three-story plant. International Nutrition makes products that are added to livestock and poultry feed to make them more nutritious.

The second and third floors of the plant collapsed on top of the first floor as key structural supports failed Monday. Kanger said firefighters were able to rescue five men initially, including one that had to be cut out of the debris.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration will determine the cause of the accident, but Kanger said the investigation could take weeks.

The explosion knocked out the lights in the building and sent workers scrambling for safety.

Nate Lewis said he was on the first floor when he heard the explosion. The building went dark, so the 21-year-old used light from his cellphone to make his way across the production floor and outside.

"I was a production line worker, although I don't know if I want to be that anymore," said Lewis, who's worked there for about four months.

Jamar White said he heard a loud crack and looked up to see the back wall of the building collapsing.

"I ran at least 150 feet," White said. "I ran far enough to make sure nothing else would keep falling."

Afterward, White said, he could see inside the third floor where at least two co-workers were screaming for help.

There appears to be structural damage to the top of the building, which sits in an industrial area just south of Interstate 80, which bisects Nebraska's largest city. There are no residences nearby and the other industrial buildings nearby weren't evacuated after the explosion.

Diane Stout said she'd heard from her husband, a manager on the plant maintenance crew, so she knew he was OK. The workers all know each other well, Stout said, so she was hoping to hear good news about friends there.

White's wife, Sarah White, said she was at home with her four children when her husband called her after the explosion.

"I could hear the panic in his voice," she said. "But he said he was OK." She said he'd been watching trucks unload from outside the building when the blast

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occurred.

"That's where he works every day. That could have been him," White said.

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