

EMERGENCY RESPONSE REVIEW

Detco Industries, Conway, Arkansas

Revised Final Report: February 25, 2005

Steve Mason – EPA Region 6

Emergency Readiness Team, Response & Prevention Branch
1445 Ross Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75202
214 / 665-2292 mason.steve@epa.gov



EPA Region 6 is issuing this Emergency Response Review as part of its ongoing effort to protect human health and the environment by responding effectively to chemical accidents.

It is important that facilities, LEPCs, and emergency responders review this information and take appropriate steps to minimize potential risks during an emergency response. This document does not substitute for EPA's regulations, nor is it a regulation itself.

It cannot impose legally binding requirements on EPA, states, or the regulated community, and may not apply to a particular situation based upon circumstances. This guidance does not represent final agency action, and may change in the future, as appropriate.

On Tuesday, January 6, 2004, at approximately 1115 hours, a series of explosions and fire occurred at the Detco Industries facility in Conway, Faulkner County, Arkansas.

Detco employed 31 personnel, and manufactured several industrial / janitorial cleaners. The facility had been in operation at the present location for approximately 8 years, housed in a 35,000 square foot building.

This report does not attempt to investigate the cause of the accident, however, most employees interviewed believed the accident to have initiated in the aerosol packaging area of the facility.

Facility personnel evacuated immediately, including two injured personnel with burns to the skin.

The Conway Fire Department received 911 calls from various sources, and responded to the facility within a matter of minutes, along with the Conway Police Department.

Firefighting personnel coordinated with facility personnel immediately to determine the best course of action.

The Fire Department had previously pre-planned at the facility, and believed they had a good handle on the nature of the chemicals involved in the fire.

The Conway Police Department established a security perimeter around the facility and an evacuation of neighboring residents and other businesses was initiated.

Several other agencies and organizations from local, State, and Federal levels responded to provide support to the local response effort.

Air monitoring around the facility was conducted by the Center for Toxicology and Environmental Health (affiliated with the University of Arkansas - Little Rock) and the Arkansas National Guard 61st Civil Support Team (CST).

The evacuation of the neighboring mobile home park remained in effect until Friday morning, January 9, after, the fire was completely extinguished, and all visible smoke plumes from the facility were stopped.

Additional information on this incident and response and can be found on the EPA Response Webpage:

www.epaossc.net/detco

OBSERVATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

Observation / Recommendation # 1 Two State Agencies, Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM) and Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) provided key personnel to assist the facility and local community in responding to the emergency and provided technical support during the cleanup operations. These officials were essential to the effective response to this emergency.

EPA Region 6 would recommend, in a large multi-agency, multi-level response such as this one, that the State appoint a State On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) to be the state representative to the Unified Command. This appointment, would be established for the response when State resources are needed. This State OSC is needed during a major response to ensure that the state has sufficient representation in decision-making made during the response.

Observation / Recommendation # 2 The City of Conway did an admirable job in handling the increased media coverage of this event. Additionally, public information officers from ADEM and ADEQ provided information to the media.

EPA Region 6 would recommend that in such a large emergency, where national media interest is high, that a joint information center be established, so that all information released to the media is filtered through this group. This JIC, which can be made up of local and state public information officials, can ensure that one consistent message is being delivered.

Observation /
Recommendation # 3 Conway Fire Department Chief Castleberry is to be commended for his effective leadership during this response. His tireless efforts calmed the community, while ensuring that his own personnel responded safely and efficiently to the fire.

EPA Region 6 would recommend that Chief Castleberry involve more staff in the lesser activities during a response, so that he is not overwhelmed with response actions.

Observation /
Recommendation # 4 The City of Conway quickly established a command post near the emergency to be used as the center of operational decisions. This command post was manned by emergency management or sheriff department personnel who were able to provide needed support.

EPA Region 6 would recommend that the command post be manned continuously during the response.

Observation /
Recommendation # 5 The City of Conway Police Department established a security perimeter around the emergency in a timely manner, and did an excellent job of controlling traffic in/out of the area. However, during the second morning of the response, numerous persons who were not directly related to the response, were found close to the hot zone.

EPA Region 6 would recommend that the security perimeter personnel be provided with more detailed information on who is needed within the protected area, and that non-essential personnel not be allowed to interfere with response operations.

Observation /
Recommendation # 6 Detco ownership and operations personnel are to be commended for their community relations during this emergency.

EPA Region 6 strongly recommends that Detco personnel become more involved with the Faulkner County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), whose charge is to assist local officials in preparing and planning for chemical emergencies within the community.