

Hazardous Materials Incident

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04/08/2015

MEDIA RELEASE

Incident Number: 15-0023517

Information Contact: Kris McDonald, Battalion Chief, 805-205-5004

Incident Type: Hazardous Materials Release

Date/Time of Incident: April 8th, 2015, 07:36-12:56 hours

Incident Location: 1300 block of Eastman Ave, Ventura, CA

Cause: Equipment failure

Injuries: None reported

Fire Equipment: 2 ALS Engine Companies, 1 ALS Truck Company, 1 Hazardous Materials Unit, 1 Command

Total Fire Personnel: 12

Agencies Involved: Ventura City Fire Department, Gas Company

Ventura City Fire personnel responded to investigate a reported gas leak inside a 2-story office building. Upon arrival they initially discovered an odor consistent with possible HVAC equipment failure/burning, and also detected elevated levels of carbon monoxide (CO). The business was immediately evacuated and attempts begun to pinpoint the exact source. Following control of both the HVAC system and natural gas utilities, the odor and CO readings not only remained but increased in some areas of the building.

Eventually forcible entry was utilized to gain access into a secure area within the building containing several large banks of computer servers and related equipment. Initial CO readings upon entry into this area were so high that they exceeded the capability of the gas monitoring equipment being employed, and had potentially entered the flammable/explosive range of the gas, which begins at 12% or more of the atmosphere. A reading of only 1,200 parts per million or higher of CO is classified as immediately dangerous to life and health. Potential ignition sources were minimized, personnel retreated from the immediate area, and the server space was forcefully ventilated using a combination of positive pressure ventilation fans and by employing the building's HVAC system with constant monitoring in progress.

After a lengthy process of systematically ruling out any possible sources of the CO, typically a by-product of combustion, it was determined that the large scale UPS battery backup system in place within the room was possibly the cause. During this time the levels of CO within the entire structure continued to fluctuate, and even increase at times. An entry was eventually made to disconnect and cease charging of the UPS battery system, soon after which the CO levels began to decrease.

Once CO levels reached acceptable levels to operate in it was determined that a large group of the batteries had in fact malfunctioned causing them to become extremely hot, to the point that the plastic battery cases themselves had begun to deform and melt. In this condition the batteries were releasing large quantities of hydrogen gas that was falsely identified by the monitoring equipment as CO. As the batteries cooled they produced less and less of the hydrogen gas until readings in the immediate area were deemed safe to operate in without respiratory protection. Private contractors were brought in by the building occupants to safely remove and properly dispose of the faulty batteries. No injuries were reported at the time of this release.



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