

Beat: Local

Explosion sets off massive blaze at Shell plant in the Netherlands

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USPA News - Two people were injured on late Tuesday evening when an explosion set off a massive blaze at a Shell oil plant in the southern Netherlands, but there was no health hazard for residents in the area, Dutch officials said on early Wednesday. The incident happened at around 10:45 p.m. local time when a large explosion occurred inside a reactor at Shell's petrochemicals complex in Moerdijk, a town in the province of North Brabant between the cities of Breda and Rotterdam.

It occurred just as a shift change was taking place. The initial explosion, which was felt and heard across the region, set off a massive blaze at the complex. Footage from the scene showed flames shooting high up in the air as firefighters struggled to get the blaze under control. Officials said the fire was out about 6.5 hours later, at around 5:25 a.m. local time. "Ethylbenzene was burnt in the reactor during this incident. This burn caused the substance to be converted into another carbon," said Moerdijk Mayor Jac Klijs. He said no increased levels of dangerous substances had been measured in the air but said any exposure would only result in irritation to the eyes and respiratory tract that would not require medical treatment. Nonetheless, residents in the surrounding region were advised to stay indoors and close doors and windows because of the smoke that was moving towards Rotterdam. The so-called NL-Alert system, which sends an emergency message to all smartphones in the affected region, was also activated. Both alerts were canceled at 5:25 a.m. Royal Dutch Shell said two employees of its Moerdijk plant suffered minor injuries in the blast and were treated at a local hospital. All employees were accounted for. Municipality officials said the injured employees had suffered some burns and were expected to be discharged from hospital early Wednesday morning. It was not immediately known what had caused Tuesday's massive explosion and fire at the plant. "The incident took place in the reactor of the MSPO-2 installation. This installation was at the time of the incident out of service due to maintenance," the company said in a statement, adding that it was cooperating with emergency services. The incident at the petrochemicals plant comes just 3.5 years after an even bigger blaze destroyed another chemical factory in Moerdijk, resulting in a regional health scare due to toxic smoke but causing no serious injuries. Many people in the area were again reminded of the 2011 disaster that made headlines for weeks. "We notice that the impact is big once again. Our residents are concerned about their safety and health and I understand that very well," the town's mayor said after Tuesday's blaze.

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