

At Least 27 Are Hurt In Blast At Page Dairy



ONE OF SEVERAL WOMEN ON THIRD FLOOR RESCUED BY FIREMEN
Anna Shine, Millbury, O., helped down ladder after Page Dairy Co. explosion

Many Rescued By Firemen On Upper Floors

Explosion Caused
By Ammonia; Chief
Puts Loss At \$12,000

At least 27 persons were hospitalized today with injuries, burns and shock after an explosion of ammonia fumes damaged the Page Dairy Co. at Wade and Knapp Sts.

Others of the 300 employees in the building reached safety, some down firemen's ladders, when the fumes spread through the three-story structure.

Ammonia Ignited

Police and private ambulances removed the injured to St. Vincent's, Mercy and East Side Hospitals.

The explosion occurred at 9:50 a.m. when a drum of ammonia, with which workmen were charging a new refrigeration system, was dropped in the engine room. The liquid escaped from the container and spread along the floor until it was ignited by a welder's torch.

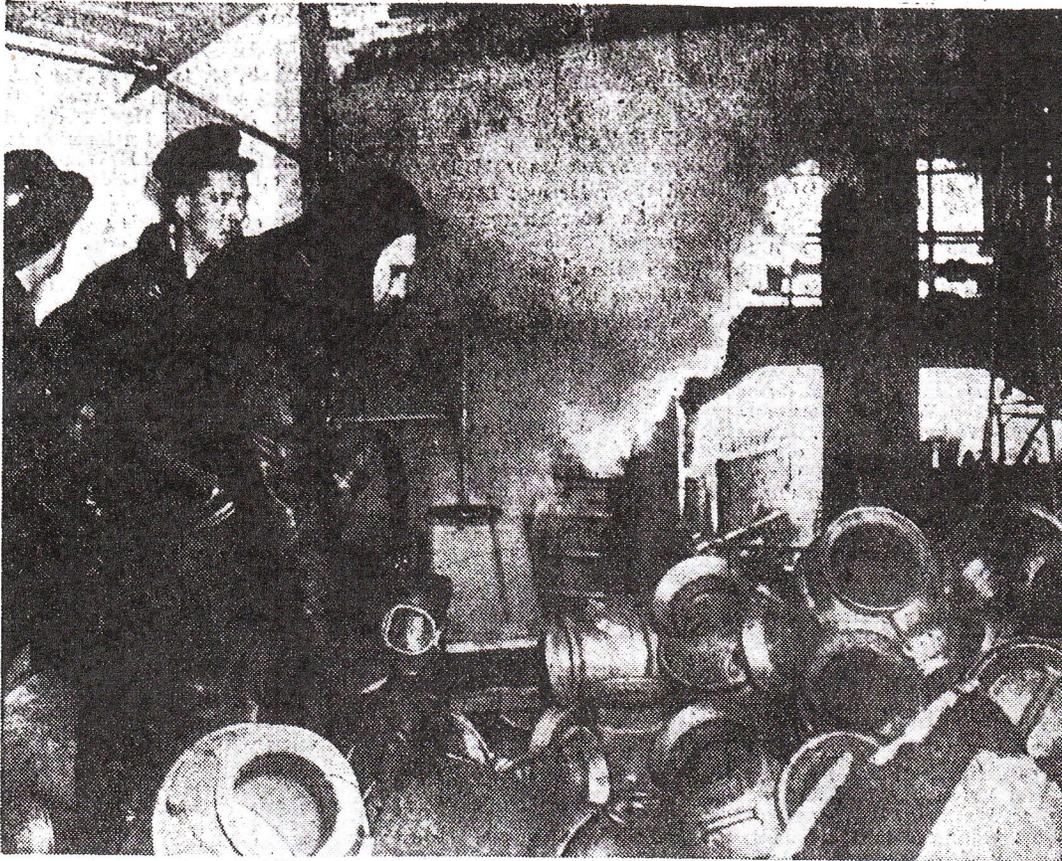
The ammonia fumes rose up a stairway and trapped workers on the second and third floors. Employees in the laundry and presser departments whose exit down the stairs was blocked by the gas were aided down ladders by firemen.

Some of these were taken to hospitals for treatment of shock and inhalation of the ammonia gas.

Hole Blown In Wall

The explosion twisted machinery in the first floor engine rooms, blew a hole 40 by 20 feet through the wall between the engine and turning rooms, sent milk cans flying about, and broke windows all around the building. Homes in the neighborhood were shaken, but not damaged.

One large steel frame window in the dairy was blown 20 feet across street.



—Blade Photos

MILK CANS WERE STREWN ABOUT AND SMALL BLAZES STARTED BY BLAST
Firemen pour water on flaming debris near explosion center. Other pictures, Page 29.

Henry Page, Jr., general manager, estimated the damage to the dairy at \$25,000, but said this was a conservative figure. Presence of fumes prevented a more detailed survey of the damage.

Deputy Chief Joseph McLaughlin, in charge of firemen at the scene, said, however, the damage appeared to be superficial and placed it at \$12,000.

Four automobiles parked outside the plant were damaged by debris.

Some of the injured were among a crew of 13 men employees of the Industrial Insulation Co., 211 Trudeau St., who were installing cork insulation on brine pipes.

Warning Is Given

Nine Industrial Insulation employees were in the engine room at the time. They had worked on the dairy job for 20½ hours until 3:30 a.m. today, and returned to work at 7 a.m.

When the ammonia began escaping, their foreman, Robert Harter, 1845 Krieger Dr., called out to them, "Run, boys!" The gas filled the room in a matter of seconds, forcing the workers to grope their way along the wall until they found the door. All were able to reach the outside before the welder's torch set off the gas.

The other four insulation men, on the second floor directly above the engine room, smelled the gas but did not realize anything was wrong until the explosion. Three of them jumped from a window five feet down to the roof of a one-story wing.

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27 Are Injured In Page Blast

Many Are Rescued At Dairy Plant

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Mr. Harter said a Page Dairy employee was attempting to hook an ammonia tank to a feeder line when the container slipped from his hands, hit the floor and began to spout ammonia.

Mr. Page said when the drum was dropped, it struck the faucet on the stationary ammonia tank and started a flow of the 20 drums of ammonia which already had been poured into it. Each drum holds 150 pounds of ammonia.

Nine other large stationary tanks in the same room did not explode or ignite, a fact which Mr. Page said saved the plant from destruction.

Supervisor Aids Workers

Richard Schumacher, 210 Millard Ave., a supervisor for Industrial Insulation, arrived at the dairy to make an inspection and distribute pay checks, only to find most of the crew lying on sidewalks outside the building. He helped administer first aid and get the workers off to hospitals.

Probably the most seriously affected of the insulation crew was Earl Spewak, 1038 Belmont Ave., who is in critical condition in an oxygen tank in Mercy Hospital.

Mr. Spewak, who was working on a scaffold 10 feet above the floor, was injured as he jumped and lay for several minutes in the midst of the escaping ammonia until he was dragged away by three fellow workers.

Two of these, Chester Kamcza, 1050 King St., and Wilfred Baumgartner, 633 Montrose Ave., were on ladders in the engine room when the explosion occurred. Both jumped to the floor and raced to the door, escaping serious injury.

Steve Lasko, 12 Ravine Park Village, a Page Dairy employee who was in the engine room, was blown 10 feet by the blast. He received head and hand burns.

James M. Ladd, 1023 National Ave., was knocked from his feet in the driveway outside the engine room.

Workman Rescued

John R. Collins, 103 Sunset Blvd., a welder at work in the engine room, escaped injury himself, and was credited with saving another victim from serious burns.

Mr. Collins said he started to run when he saw the ammonia escaping and was nearly out of the room when he glanced back and saw a man lying on the floor.

"I held my breath, dashed back and picked the man up and carried him outside. Seconds later the gas ignited," Mr. Collins said.

Another employee who escaped injury was John Armburst, Whitehouse, O., a steamfitter, who said he was standing only three feet from the tank when it fell. He ran to safety.

Mrs. Harriett McHugh, 39, of 2103 Forest Ave., secretary to Mr. Page, suffered an injured knee when she fell while running from her office. She said she was unaware steps leading to the room had been blown away in the explosion and stumbled as she left the office.

Near hysteria, Mrs. Edna Robinson, 42, of 652 Oak St., a presser in the company laundry, collapsed before a third floor window, directly above the point of the blast. She was carried down a ladder by firemen.

Trapped By Fumes

Mrs. Robinson and other women working in the laundry rushed across the floor to a restroom when the fumes seeped in.

"Someone shouted to us, 'Get out of there as fast as you can,'" Mrs. Robinson said. "We shouted, 'We can't get out—we can't get away from the window!'"

The laundry workers were among the 15 to 20 carried down ladders by the crew of No. 5 engine house.

Homer Babcock, 801 Colburn St., was working in the bottling room and was called to the engine room to help with the ammonia. He had just gotten past the doorway when the blast blew him back through the door and against a wall, burning him and breaking a leg.

Some of the injured were given emergency treatment at the plant by Mrs. Luella Susor, 1915 Hurd St., sales-service department employee, who applied butter to burns before arrival of rescue squadmen and ambulances.

Elmer Korb, 1104 White St., said he heard two explosions. The first came while he was outside the engine room, and the second as he ran to summon aid.

Mr. Korb was burned when his clothing caught fire, but he was saved from more serious injury by quick action of other employees who ripped the flaming garments from him.

Sounded Like Quake

Louis L. Becker, labor relations director for Page Dairy, said the rumbling of the explosion sounded like an earthquake.

"I thought the whole place was blowing up," said Mr. Becker. "It's lucky the windows in front went out like they did. It saved the whole plant from being demolished."

The Spicer Mfg. Division of the Dana Corp. immediately offered to send its medical and first aid staff of 15, and Toledo Hospital offered to send as many doctors as necessary. There was no need for the extra assistance, however.

Some of the injured, witnesses reported, were hurt after they left the building. They had fled the dairy when fumes began to penetrate the place and sought shelter in an alley at the rear. Gathered in a group they were burned when the explosion shot flames out a large door and through windows on the alley side.

Alterations and remodeling at the dairy have been in progress four months. The new refrigeration system was to have been put in operation Monday.

All Customers To Receive Milk

Louis L. Becker, labor relations director at the Page Dairy Co., said all customers will receive milk despite the explosion. Babcock and Ohio Clover Leaf Dairies have offered their bottling facilities, he said.

Henry Page, Jr., said the dairy would be in operation this weekend.

Mr. Page's father, Henry Page, Sr., president of the dairy, is vacationing in California.