

KABOOM...Second blast in two years damages All Points elevator

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Wednesday, 05 January 2011 18:26 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 January 2011 18:28



A little more than two years after the last elevator explosion at All Points Cooperative, it was the same song, second verse.

Two blasts rattled downtown businesses about 11:45 a.m. on Dec. 29.

Fire trucks and ambulances screamed to the elevator within minutes of the explosion while Gothenburg Memorial Hospital personnel braced for injuries or casualties.

Police cordoned off a two-block area around the elevator, as they did after the Nov. 20, 2008 explosion, but the yellow tape was removed later on Wednesday.

For about six hours, Union Pacific Railroad trains rumbled through town and past the elevator much slower than usual.

On Monday morning, All Points Cooperative chief executive officer Ed Foster said elevator officials and employees were “just in shock.”

“At least there were no injuries,” Foster said.

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An employee inside the elevator when it exploded in 2008 was hospitalized for burns but recovered.

The scenario last week could have been much different. Foster said employees were loading a train with corn, a patron was emptying grain and others were in and around the elevator.

Foster credits the lack of injuries or worse to safety equipment put in place during reconstruction after the 2008 blast.

Explosion vents on the elevator legs and roofs released the brunt of the impact, said fire chief and All Points vice-president of agronomy Mark Ballmer.

Ballmer said the vents released the explosion like a pressure cooker, lifting the roofs atop four bins instead of exploding.

Without the vents in place, All Points grain-handling vice-president Steve Costello said the elevator would have been scrap metal again.

When Ballmer heard a kaboom last Wednesday, he said he wasn't sure what had happened.

"When I ran outside and saw what was going on, I thought 'No way, it can't be,' " he said.

Costello said he was home eating lunch north of Gothenburg when an employee called to tell of the blast.

"I thought he was joking and said it wasn't funny," Costello said.

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After the blast, Ballmer said surface fire and smoke seeped from the top of the elevator. Fire fighters continue to pump water on smoldering grain as needed.

Flames, smoke and a ripped-apart head house were what passersby could see following the 2008 explosion.

With freezing temperatures during the days following the last blast, Ballmer said the fire department was challenged by frozen hoses and split lines.

Until damage is assessed, All Points officials said the facility has been shut down, noting that mill wrights, engineers, concrete workers and others arrived Monday and two state fire marshals were on the scene the day of the explosion.

“The fire marshals will release the facility and that won’t happen until

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