Four escape injury in Colfax hazardous-materials incident.

By Gloria Beverage
Gold Country News Service

Four people escaped serious injury Thursday morning after inhaling a small amount of poisonous fumes at a Colfax water treatment facility.

At about 9 a.m., reported Placer County Water Agency, risk manager Bryant Newcomb, a Sierra Chemical Co. truck driver arrived to deliver sodium hypochlorite to PCWA’s water treatment facility on Pleasant Street.

Instead of hooking up to the appropriate tank, the driver apparently began pumping the chemicals into tank filled with aluminum sulfate creating a mixture of poisonous fumes, Newcomb said.

The driver and a PCWA employee, Mike Williams, were transported to Sutter Auburn Faith Hospital “as a precautionary measure” after inhaling a small amount of chlorine gas, Newcomb said. Both were later released.

Colfax volunteer firefighters, Mike Viscie and Agnie Hannah were the first emergency personnel to arrive on the scene and assisted in shutting down the tanks, noted Placer County Sheriff’s Sgt. Dan Wilson.

While Viscie and Hannah were treated at the scene for minor respiratory problems, both later complained of chest pains and were transported to the hospital, reported Fire Chief Scott Brady.

With the chemicals quickly stabilized, only two nearby residents had to be evacuated for a short time, Sgt. Wilson said.

The Colfax Volunteer Fire Department Environmental Health and AMR Ambulance also responded to the scene.
Small system technologies

SPEA's portfolio of solar technologies are designed to address various energy-related problems, including the need for clean and efficient energy solutions. The technologies include solar panels, solar cells, and solar thermal systems. These systems are used in a variety of applications, such as residential, commercial, and industrial settings. The portfolio includes both photovoltaic and concentrating technologies, which are designed to maximize energy production and efficiency. The technologies are also designed to be cost-effective and durable, ensuring long-term reliability and performance. Overall, SPEA's portfolio of solar technologies is aimed at providing clean and sustainable energy solutions to meet the growing demand for renewable energy.
Accident Releases Lethal Gas

A chemical accident at Mattawoman Wastewater Treatment Plant (Mason Springs, Md.) on June 14 generated chlorine gas that led to the evacuation of the 22 area residents. Seven people at the accident site had to be treated at a La Plata, Md., hospital.

The incident began shortly before 7:45 a.m., according to Charles County spokesperson Nina Voehl. A tanker truck delivering ferric chloride to the facility pumped about 400 gal (1500 L) of the chemical into a sodium hypochlorite tank. The chemicals mixed and produced chlorine gas, which escaped the indoor tank and spread throughout the 40-ft x 50-ft (12-m x 15-m) building. The gas also escaped the building, extending about 20 ft (6 m) on each side and drifting south about 100 ft (30.5 m) from the building, said Jerome Michael, facility director.

Mattawoman uses ferric chloride to precipitate phosphorus, while sodium hypochlorite is used for effluent disinfection. The two chemicals are never mixed intentionally in the facility’s operation. However, mixing them produces chlorine gas, which burns the lungs and interferes with respiration. Short-term inhalation of the gas can cause burns, difficulty breathing, headache, dizziness, bluish skin color, and lung damage, according to the chemical’s material safety data sheet.

Five Mattawoman employees, the delivery truck driver, and another delivery person were exposed to the fumes and went to Civista Medical Center (La Plata, Md.). All were treated and released, except the chemical delivery driver who remained overnight for observation. Everyone who came in contact with the fumes went to the hospital “for safety’s sake,” according to Voehl.

County officials evacuated a 0.5-mi (0.8-km) area surrounding the facility as a precaution. Voehl said. The 22 people cleared from their homes were allowed to return almost immediately once the extent of the problem was assessed, she said.

The Mattawoman personnel relied on their training to deal with the incident by evacuating the area and alerting the proper agencies. Personnel followed the facility’s emergency response plan for hazardous chemicals, Michael said. Calls were made to 911, the office of emergency risk management, and the director of emergency management. Regional hazardous materials teams responded to the incident and contained the gas.

“A lot a people here pitched in to help and make sure everyone was receiving the aid they needed,” Michael said.

How the chemical was put in the wrong tank still is under investigation, Voehl said. At press time, no possibilities had been ruled out, but Voehl indicated that the accident might have resulted from a miscommunication or a mistake by the delivery driver.

— Steve Spicer, Operations Forum
Workers hospitalized after chemical reaction at water plant

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- (AP) -- An accidental mix of odor control chemicals at a downtown water treatment plant Tuesday created a toxic cloud that sickened about 30 workers.

A contractor driving a tanker poured a chemical in the wrong tank about 10 a.m., said David Tucker, spokesman for the Metro Water Services. The chemical reaction formed chlorine vapors.

About 50 workers were evacuated. Some complained of eye, throat and nose irritation, and had trouble breathing. The most seriously affected were given oxygen by paramedics and taken to area hospitals where they were treated and released.

The tanker driver pumped sodium hypochlorite, a bleach used for odor, into a tank with the residue of ferric chloride, another odor control chemical, Tucker said.

Hazardous materials workers removed the hose from the tank and reopened the building after about an hour. Tucker said the incident was being investigated.