Accident Kills Oronite Worker

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One worker was killed and another injured in an accident at Chevron Oronite’s lubricant additive factory on Jurong Island, Singapore, Sunday. The company said some manufacturing operations have been suspended pending an investigation and assessment of damage.

The incident occurred in a manufacturing unit at approximately 4 p.m. local time, Oronite said, as employees unloaded phosphorus pentasulfide, a highly flammable chemical used as an intermediate in production of lube additives. Initial reports by the Civil Defence Force, which investigates such incidents in Singapore, said a flash fire appeared to have occurred.

A report by Channel NewsAsia said a heavy metal container fell on the man who died. It was unclear whether the explosion caused the container to fall or was triggered by it. Likewise it had not yet been determined whether the container or the explosion killed the man. The second man suffered second-degree burns and was hospitalized in stable condition, Oronite said.

This is the second fatal accident at the plant, which opened in 1998. Another worker was killed in April 2004.

The plant is the largest lube additive facility in Asia and is part of Oronite’s regional headquarters, which employs a total of 250 people. The plant manufactures additive components and blends additives for automotive and industrial lubricants. It primarily supplies Asia-Pacific, although smaller volumes go to other regions.

Oronite said operations in the unit where the accident occurred were halted to allow an investigation of the cause and to determine the extent of damage. Operations in other process units were suspended as a safety precaution. Blending and shipping activities were not interrupted.

The company said it does not yet know when normal operations will resume nor the extent to which customers will be affected.

“We are currently assessing the situation and reviewing alternatives,” spokesman Jan Lee said. “We are unable to give definitive answers at this moment.”

Oronite is based in San Ramon, Calif., and also operates major plants in Gonfreville, France, and Oakpoint, La., and smaller facilities in Omaezaki, Japan and Chennai, India. Lee said the company might tap these plants to try to avoid impacting customers.