



Texas Department of Insurance

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News Release

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE and ATF CONCLUDE SCENE INVESTIGATION AT THE WEST FERTILIZER PLANT

FIRE RULED AS UNDETERMINED

WEST, TX – The Texas State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives National Response Team (ATF), along with ATF Special Agents from the Houston Field Division, announce the conclusion of the scene investigation at the West Fertilizer Plant fire and explosion that occurred on April 17, 2013. Both agencies have ruled the cause of the fire as "undetermined."

"At this time, the State Fire Marshal's Office and the ATF are ruling the cause of the fire as undetermined," said State Fire Marshal Chris Connealy. According to Connealy, an undetermined cause finding is made "when the cause cannot be proven to an acceptable level of certainty, which could be due to insufficient information or if multiple causes could not be eliminated." Connealy further stated that "while the scene examination has been completed, the investigation will remain open for purposes of conducting additional interviews, following up on leads, and the like."

Robert Champion, ATF Special Agent in Charge, said, "ATF and SFMO had eliminated the following causes: rekindling of an earlier fire, spontaneous ignition, 480 volt electrical system, anhydrous ammonia, ammonium nitrate, smoking, and weather. The following causes could **not** be eliminated: 120 volt electrical system, a golf cart, and an intentionally set fire."

The State Fire Marshal's Office and ATF worked together to find the origin and cause of the fire and explosion for almost four weeks. Over 104 agents, investigators, and experts were on scene. Over 200 leads were developed and over 400 interviews were conducted. ATF has spent close to \$1,000,000 on the investigation, including approximately \$500,000 in the rental of heavy equipment, which assisted in excavating the scene. As part the scene excavation, investigators and agents sifted through 300,000 pounds of corn and other material searching for evidence. Additionally, the fertilizer and seed building and the electrical system were reconstructed.

The State Fire Marshal's Office is required by law to investigate all Line of Duty Deaths (LODD) of firefighters in Texas. SFMO is currently investigating the deaths of the 12 individuals who died while responding to the West Fertilizer Plant fire. The LODD investigation is ongoing and is likely to take several months to complete.

SFMO and ATF extend our deepest appreciation to the citizens of West, the volunteers, and the non-profit agencies who supported us during this investigation. Additionally, SFMO and ATF would like to recognize all of the agencies that assisted in the investigation. There were over 20 law enforcement and regulatory agencies that were integral to the conclusion of the scene investigation.

This investigation was lead by SFMO and ATF with the assistance of the West Police Department, McLennan County Sheriff's Office, McLennan County District Attorney's Office, Texas Department of Public Safety – DPS Criminal Intelligence Division, Texas Rangers, U.S. Attorney's Office - Western District, the Environmental Protection Agency, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Department Insurance - Fraud Unit, Texas Department of Emergency Management, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Office of State Chemist, Waco Fire Marshal, Hill County Sheriff's Office, Texas Task Force I/II – Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Postal Police, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, Texas Forest Service, Lake Jackson Fire Marshal's Office, Chemical Safety Board, Harker Heights Police Department, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Union Pacific Rail Road, Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

The State Fire Marshal's Office is a division of the Texas Department of Insurance. If you have any additional questions, please contact Rachel Moreno, SFMO, Rachel.Moreno@tdi.texas.gov or call (979) 277-4278 or Franceska Perot, ATF, Franceska.Perot@atf.gov or (281) 914-8124.

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