

Texas Tragedy: Agricultural accident or clandestine cover-up?

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2013-04-24

“The risks associated with anhydrous ammonia and ammonium nitrate are well documented. They have both been associated with crudely made bombs used in terrorist attacks... Yet, with this widespread understanding of the risks of anhydrous ammonia, West Fertilizer Company told the EPA that their plant posed ‘No Risk’ of explosions.” — Attorney Justin Hill.¹

On Wednesday, April 17, 2013 at approximately 8 p.m., the small farming community of West in the state of Texas, United States, was rocked by an explosion measuring 2.1 on the Richter scale, which left damage in its aftermath resembling a Cruise missile attack. As an immediate consequence of the blast, 14 people were killed, most of whom were volunteer fire fighters, more than 200 were injured, over 50 homes destroyed, a nearby apartment building was gutted and more than four city blocks of the town were leveled.² Toxic fumes caused by the explosion and subsequent fire forced an evacuation of half of the town’s residents.³

Describing the apocalyptic scene, McLennan county sheriff Parnell McNamara said, “I’ve never seen anything like this. It looks like a war zone with all the debris.” West’s mayor, Tommy Muska, said that the blast area looked as if a nuclear bomb had detonated. Teacher Debby Marak, who was near the plant when it blew up, said, “It was like being in a tornado. Stuff was flying everywhere. It blew out my windshield. It was like the whole earth shook.” A resident of Bynum, some 20 km from the epicenter of the explosion in West, reported that she, her husband and daughter had heard not one but three distinct explosions, which “sounded like three bombs going off very close to us.”⁴ Trooper D.L. Wilson of the Texas Department of Public Safety said the blast zone looked “just like Iraq, just like the Murrah building in Oklahoma City.”⁵

While the immediate cause of the blast is evidently ammonium nitrate, no explanation has been offered to as to why such a large quantity of the explosive substance had been stored at the plant owned by the West Fertilizer Company. According to regulations governing the storage of ammonium nitrate, 400 pounds (183 kilograms) or more of this dangerous substance must be reported to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The mass of ammonium nitrate stored on West Fertilizer Company property was not twice, not 10 times, nor 100 times, but some 1,350 times the minimum reportable quantity: 270 tons (245 metric tons).⁶ The amount involved alone suggests an intention to conceal something. What were the good Texans at West Fertilizer planning to do with so much of this dangerous material?

Ammonium nitrate is produced for use as a nitrogen-rich agricultural fertilizer. Developed originally by German scientists to replace more expensive Chilean nitrates, ammonium nitrate is preferred over other more expensive fertilizers and is thought to improve the quality of leafy green vegetables. A powerful oxidizing agent, the chemical compound is also sensitive to heat and is used as an explosive or as an additive to other explosives such as trinitrotoluene (TNT). One such explosive is ANFO, 94% ammonium nitrate and 6% fuel oil, which is used in the mining industry as a blasting agent and has been used in terrorist attacks.⁷ The most common commercial explosive, ANFO, when properly prepared, can yield more explosive power than TNT.⁸ According to U.S. authorities, ANFO was the explosive used in the April 19, 1995

bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma⁹ however, this is disputed by other sources which suggest that the bombing was also a U.S. government false-flag operation connected to a classified project code named "Dipole Might."¹⁰ The basic problem with the official version of the Murrah story is that for ANFO to be effective, it must be confined such as in a bore hole,¹¹ which would not have been the case in the back of a Ryder rental truck.

While technically classified as a blasting agent,¹² ammonium nitrate detonates with a blast velocity of 2,700 to 4,500 meters per second placing its destructive power in the high explosive range, which is roughly 1,500 meters per second and up. By weight, ammonium nitrate yields more expansive gas than any other explosive material but has two major drawbacks which make it a dangerous and unpredictable substance: first, it is water soluble, so it can quickly lose its sensitivity, or ability to be easily detonated, when exposed to water; and, second it is subject to a phenomenon called cycling which is the changing of the crystalline structure with temperature. Cycling commonly occurs at -18° and 32° C, and at the higher temperature, the change in crystalline structure results in higher density which in turn results in higher detonation velocity.¹³ In short, if ammonium nitrate is stored under dry conditions and subjected to high temperatures, as would be the case in a metal storage silo in Texas, its explosive power can actually increase. Incidentally, there appears to be a safe alternative to ammonium nitrate for use as fertilizer: Sulf-N 26, a mixture of ammonium nitrate and ammonium sulfate which has a much lower detonation risk when mixed with fuel oil.¹⁴

An aura of regulatory immunity appears to envelop West Fertilizer Company. U.S. Democratic Representative Bennie Thompson of Massachusetts, ranking member of the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security, exclaimed, "This facility was known to have chemicals well above the threshold amount to be regulated under the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards Act (CFATS), yet we understand that DHS did not even know the plant existed until it blew up."¹⁵ In addition to lying to the EPA about the risk of an explosion, the company was cited by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality in 2006 for failing to obtain or to qualify for a permit.¹⁶

West Fertilizer had been fined a paltry \$2300.00 in 2006 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for deficiencies in the company's risk management plan, operating procedures and employee training.¹⁷ A follow up inspection by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality took place in 2007 because of complaints by nearby residents of odors emanating from the plant. However, despite these safety violations, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) had not inspected the company's facilities since 1985.¹⁸ The chairman of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has even theorized that the explosion might have been caused by a rail car loaded with ammonium nitrate at the plant and not a problem in the plant itself.¹⁹ Could there perhaps be a deeper reason that the company's shoddy safety practices and reporting omissions were overlooked by U.S. governmental regulatory authorities?

Certainly compared to the frenzied fervor of the official response to the recent Boston Marathon bomb attack, the apparent absence of urgency in the aftermath of the West Fertilizer blast has been astounding. While U.S. government officials from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and U.S. Chemical Safety Board have begun their investigations, conclusive results may not be available for another six months. Despite the firm's history of

negligence in reporting and safeguarding hazardous materials, Texas state attorney Greg Abbott indicated that it is too early in the inquiry to speculate on filing charges of criminal negligence against West Fertilizer's owner Don Adair or anyone else.²⁰ In fact, U.S. Representative Bill Flores of Texas brushed aside any speculation that the blast might have been a terrorist operation and stated, "I would not expect sabotage by any stretch of the imagination."²¹

For his part, Adair, who also owns Adair Grain, indicated in a statement that, as a member of the West Church of Christ, he and his family would "continue to assist in relief efforts through our church family," and pledged "to ensure nothing like this ever happens again."²² One can only imagine if West Fertilizer had been owned by Muslims, allegations that the blast was an act of sabotage by Islamist terrorists would have choked the air waves, but since we are dealing here with white Christian Americans, this catastrophe is being written off as an unfortunate agricultural accident. Why wasn't this company taken to court long ago and why is this tragedy being downplayed by officials to such an extent now?

While this is just speculation, perhaps West Fertilizer is a front company which supplies CIA-trained terrorists with explosives for their havoc-wreaking improvised explosive devices. Considering the occurrence of the West, Texas blast just two days after the Boston Marathon bombings, one cannot help but wonder if perhaps the U.S. government carried out a clandestine cover-up there to get rid of evidence that would relate to the Boston bombing.

In any event, considering the reckless irresponsibility displayed by the owner, the quantities of explosive material involved, and lack of accountability before regulatory authorities, I would not be surprised if this tragic accident turned out to be another U.S. government covert "OP."

Endnotes

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³ "After Boston Deadly Explosions and Fire in Waco, Texas Fertilizer Plant, Leaving 15 Dead, Injuring More Than 160," *Jafrica News*, 18 April 2013, accessed 22 April 2013, <http://jafricanews.com/2013/04/18/after-boston-deadly-explosions-fire-in-waco-texas-fertilizer-plant-leaving-15-dead-injuring-more-than-160/>.

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