

WORLDNEWS

■ **EXPLOSION:** More than 720 injured

Firefighter rescued from blast zone in Tianjin

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN
Associated Press

TIANJIN, China — Rescuers pulled out a firefighter who was trapped for 32 hours after responding to a fire and huge explosions in the Chinese port city of Tianjin as authorities dealt Friday with a fire still smouldering amid potentially dangerous chemicals.

A rapid succession of explosions late Wednesday — one equal to 21 tons of TNT — killed at least 56 people, injured more than 720 and left several firefighters missing.

They were sparked by a fire at what authorities said were shipping containers containing hazardous material at a warehouse, and they struck a mostly industrial zone late at night — otherwise the death toll could have been much higher. But, the warehouse was close enough to residences to appear out of compliance with safety regulations, raising questions about whether the facility had properly been authorized.

The toll included at least 21 firefighters among the more than 1,000 sent to the disaster. Firefighters initially responded to a fire at the warehouse and many of them apparently were killed by a series of explosions triggered 40 minutes after the fire was reported.

“Reinforcements had just arrived on the scene and were just getting to work when the explosions occurred and therefore there was no chance to escape, and that’s why the casualties were so severe,” Tianjin Fire Department head Zhou Tian said at a news conference Friday. “We’re now doing all we can to rescue the missing.”

One firefighter was pulled from the zone at about dawn Friday and taken to a hospital, where he was being treated for face, chest and foot injuries, state broad-



NG HAN GUAN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

In this photo taken Thursday, a man walks through the site of an explosion at a warehouse in northeastern China’s Tianjin municipality. Rescuers have pulled a survivor from an industrial zone about 32 hours after it was devastated by huge blasts in China’s Tianjin port. Meanwhile, authorities are moving forward in dealing with a fire still smoldering amid potentially dangerous chemicals.

cester CCTV reported.

It was a bright moment in a day otherwise clouded by mistrust and unanswered questions. Local officials have been hard-pressed to explain why authorities permitted hazardous goods warehouses so close to residential complexes and critical infrastructure. They also have been publicly reticent about suspicions that firefighters may have sparked the explosions by spraying water on volatile chemicals.

Hazardous chemical warehouses must be at least 1,000 metres away from public buildings, highways, railways and industrial enterprises under regulations enacted by China’s State Administration of Work Safety in 2001.

But, Google Earth shows that Ruihai’s two hazmat warehouses are less than 500 metres from the S11 Haibin Expressway, and within 500 metres of a 104,438-square meter apartment complex built by China Vanke Co., one of China’s largest devel-

opments. Vanke said it acquired the land before Ruihai Logistics began loading toxic substances in its warehouses one block away.

“The land was near normal logistics warehouses when we acquired it in April 2010,” the company said in an e-mailed statement. “We were not aware they were later transformed into warehouses for hazardous material.”

The housing development’s windows were shattered and the side facing the explosions singed. The entire complex was evacuated and falls within a 1- to 2-kilometre zone around the blast site that has been cordoned off by police.

Local officials have publicly reassured a skeptical public that the blasts have not contaminated the air, but many residents weren’t taking chances and could be seen Friday wearing air-filtering masks. “I don’t usually wear a mask but I don’t quite trust what the government says,” Ma Wiehan said from behind her mask as she walked with her six-month-old daughter. “I’m doing this for my child.”

Questions about whether firefighters may have sparked the blasts have been circulating in the Chinese media. One report suggested that water used by first responders may have come into contact with a chemical that explodes on contact with water, but an official also is quoted as saying the first wave of firefighters could not have sparked the blasts.

Many of the fire trucks seen at the site hours after the blasts use a kind of firefighting foam.

Authorities have not said what caused the explosions, saying only that they originated at the warehouse owned by Ruihai International Logistics. Its website says the company is authorized to handle chemicals ranging from flammable gases and liquids, including compressed natural gas and ethyl acetate, to chemicals that explode on contact with water, including sodium cyanide.

and calcium carbide.

However, the warehouse was a transit point and authorities have no clear picture of what was there at the time of the blasts. Records at the site were destroyed in the disaster, meaning that authorities must rely on customs documents, said Gao Huaiyou, deputy director of occupational safety in Tianjin.

City officials so far have confirmed only that calcium carbide, potassium nitrate and sodium nitrate were at the warehouse.

Zhou said further firefighting efforts must go slowly because of the potentially complex mix of chemicals at the site.

“Many types of different materials with different characteristics are mixed together and could at any time result in a chemical reaction or explosion,” Zhou said.

At one point early Friday evening, a small explosion could

be seen inside the cordoned-off zone, in what may have been a controlled blast by firefighters.

In an interview with the Shanghai-based publication The Paper, a fire official at the Ministry of Public Safety, Lei Jinde, was quoted as confirming that the first wave of firefighters used water to cool down areas on fire. When asked whether they knew there was calcium carbide at the warehouse, he said yes and that firefighters would not have sprayed water on the substance.

When asked whether the initial firefighter response could have sparked the second blast, Lei said “No. The response procedure must have been scientific.”

On the day after the blasts, Tianjin environmental protection chief Wen Wurui told a news conference that there had been no apparent contamination of the air, based on samples taken at five air monitoring stations throughout the city. He also said all waterways leading from the disaster site to the sea had been sealed to contain any potential water leaks.

Tianjin, with a population of about 15 million, is being promoted by the Chinese government as a centre for finance and high-tech industry. The Tianjin Economic Development Area has attracted foreign investors including Motorola, Toyota, Samsung and Novozymes.

Toyota spokesman Itsuki Kurosu said Friday that more than 50 of its employees in Tianjin were among the injured, though the automaker was still confirming the extent of the injuries.

Many of the hundreds of people hurt in the explosions were cut by shattered glass.

■ **RELATIONS:** John Kerry made a nationally broadcast call for democratic change

U.S. flag raised again in Cuba

BRADLEY KLAPPER
and MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN
Associated Press

HAVANA — U.S. Marines raised the Stars and Stripes over the newly reopened American Embassy in Cuba on Friday as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made an unprecedented nationally broadcast call for democratic change on the island ruled by a single party for more than five decades.

“We remain convinced the people of Cuba would be best served by a genuine democracy, where people are free to choose their leaders, express their ideas, practice their faith,” Kerry said before an audience of Cuban and U.S. diplomats on the embassy grounds and millions of islanders watching and listening live.

Political change remains a taboo topic in Cuba despite a series of economic reforms and the reestablishment of diplomatic ties with the U.S. under President Raul Castro, who took over when his brother Fidel formally stepped down in 2008 after decades in power.

Hundreds of Cubans gathered outside the former U.S. Interests Section, newly emblazoned with the letters “Embassy of the United States of America.” They cheered as Kerry spoke, the United States Army Brass Quintet played “The Star-Spangled Banner” and the flag rose alongside the building overlooking the Malecon seaside promenade.

After the ceremony, Kerry met with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez. He told reporters afterward that diplomats would meet in the second week of September to set the agenda for wide-ranging talks on normalization, covering topics from maritime security and public health to the billions of dollars in claims and counterclaims stemming from Cuban confiscation of U.S. property and the subsequent U.S. trade embargo on Cuba.

Rodriguez said the countries continue to have profound differences over issues such as human rights. He accused the United States of rights abuses from police shootings of black men to mistreatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. naval base that Cuba says must be returned before relations can be fully normalized.



ISMAEL FRANCISCO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry watches the raising of the American flag at the newly opened U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba.

“Cuba isn’t a place where there’s racial discrimination, police brutality or deaths resulting from those problems,” Rodriguez said. “The territory where torture occurs and people are held in legal limbo isn’t under Cuban jurisdiction.”

Many Afro-Cubans say discrimination is still rampant despite the revolution’s egalitarian ideals, and human rights groups say regular, short-term arrests of government opponents aim to intimidate dissent.

U.S. President Barack Obama made a milder call for change in Cuba when he announced the new U.S. policy of engagement on Dec. 17. In 2002, former President Jimmy Carter addressed Cubans in an unprecedented hour of live, uncensored television — telling them their country did not meet international standards of democracy and repeatedly promoting a grass-roots campaign for greater civil liberties.

But, a live call for change from a serving U.S. official speaking in Havana — Kerry is the first secretary of state to visit since 1945 — was remarkable for its bluntness and the national spotlight in which it came.

It seemed that virtually all of Cuba was glued to a television or listening to a live radio broadcast on a cellphone. Many islanders lauded Kerry’s call for reform, including greater access to technology on an island with one of the world’s lowest rates of internet penetration. They paired their praise with calls for the United States to lift the 53-year-old trade

embargo on Cuba and allow easier travel between the two countries.

“We agree with what Kerry said,” said Julio Garcia, a 51-year-old mechanic. “More democracy, elections, we hope for that to come with this diplomatic opening.”

Giant Cuban flags hung from the balconies of nearby apartment buildings and people gathered at windows with a view of the embassy, which was formally converted from an interests section on July 20. Self-employed graphic designers Danay Lopez, 28, and her husband Yosvel Martinez, 32, watched the ceremony with their three-year-old son, sang both countries’ national anthems and shouted “Long live Cuba!” and “Long live the United States!” as the event drew to a close.

“Kerry spoke about democracy, freedom, Wi-Fi, and he’s right,” Lopez said. “We want all that to be freed up, but (also) for the U.S. to free up travel, and I don’t want my son to live under the embargo.”

Kerry said a longtime U.S. strategy of trying to isolate Cuba, foment grass-roots agitation and provoke regime change by choking off trade and finance through the embargo had failed.

“The policies of the past have not led to a democratic transition here in Cuba. It would be equally unrealistic to expect normalizing relations to have a transformative impact in the short term,” he said. “After all, Cuba’s future is for Cubans to shape.”

CLASSIC FINDS!

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS OF UNION GAS LIMITED

Union Gas Limited has applied for approval to change its gas commodity, storage and transportation rates effective January 1, 2016.

Learn more. Have your say.

Union Gas Limited has applied to change its rates to better reflect how it supplies natural gas to its customers. The proposed changes include the following:

- A change in the reference price used to set rates on a quarterly basis for a majority of its customers; and
- A change to how it allocates costs to the different types of customers that it serves.

An average residential customer would see the following annual bill impact, but these impacts would only start in 2018:

Residential Customer – Service Area	Approximate Bill Impact
Southern Ontario (Windsor to Hamilton)	Decrease of \$20
Northern Delivery Area (North Bay to Kapuskasing)	Increase of \$26
All Other Delivery Areas	Decrease of \$1.50 – \$51.50

Other customers in Union Gas Limited’s service area, including businesses, will also be affected.

THE ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD IS HOLDING A PUBLIC HEARING

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) will hold a public hearing to consider the application filed by Union Gas.

We will question Union Gas on the case. We will also hear arguments from individuals and from groups that represent the customers of Union Gas. At the end of this hearing, the OEB will decide whether to approve the changes that Union Gas has requested in this application.

The OEB is an independent and impartial public agency. We make decisions that serve the public interest. Our goal is to promote a financially viable and efficient energy sector that provides you with reliable energy services at a reasonable cost.

BE INFORMED AND HAVE YOUR SAY

You have the right to information regarding this application and to be involved in the process.

- You can review the application filed by Union Gas on the OEB’s website now.
- You can file a letter with your comments, which will be considered during the hearing.
- You can become an active participant (called an intervenor). Apply by **August 25, 2015** or the hearing will go ahead without you and you will not receive any further notice of the proceeding.
- At the end of the process, you can review the OEB’s decision and its reasons on our website.

LEARN MORE

Our file number for this case is **EB-2015-0181**. To learn more about this hearing, find instructions on how to file letters or become an intervenor, or to access any document related to this case, please select the file number **EB-2015-0181** from the list on the OEB website: www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/notice. You can also phone our Consumer Relations Centre at 1-877-632-2727 with any questions.

ORAL VS. WRITTEN HEARINGS

There are two types of OEB hearings – oral and written. The OEB will determine at a later date whether to proceed by way of a written or oral hearing. If you think an oral hearing is needed, you can write to the OEB to explain why by **August 25, 2015**.

PRIVACY

If you write a letter of comment, your name and the content of your letter will be put on the public record and the OEB website. However, your personal telephone number, home address and e-mail address will be removed. If you are a business, all your information will remain public. If you apply to become an intervenor, all information will be public.

This hearing will be held under section 36 of the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, S.O. 1998 c.15 (Schedule B).

