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A look at the 25 Rubicon accidental releases over 10 years that potentially exposed 130 workers

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JAN 3, 2021 - 7:00 PM



An aerial view of the central part of the Rubicon LLC petrochemical manufacturing facility. State records show that 119 workers were exposed to accidental releases between January 2010 and December 2019.

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Between January 2010 and December 2019, Rubicon LLC notified state and local officials about 25 accidental releases of potentially harmful chemicals that resulted in the exposure or potential exposure of company employees or contractors on its 81-acre campus in Ascension Parish. Several of those incidents resulted in the exposure of workers at nearby facilities.

In those 25 incidents, 130 Rubicon and Rubicon contractor employees and employees on other sites reported to first-aid stations for observation or treatment, according to state Department of Environmental Quality and Louisiana State Police records. Of those, 22 workers were treated offsite at clinics or hospitals, including two employees of a neighboring facility. Here are brief descriptions of each incident, taken from DEQ files.

- **Aug. 29, 2010:** A valve on a high-pressure anhydrous hydrochloric acid line failed, releasing hydrochloric acid in gas form. A Rubicon employee was sent to the company's first-aid station for observation and later returned to work. The release also caused the shutdown of nearby highway crossings.
- **Oct. 10, 2010:** A Rubicon computer model indicated there was a release of phosgene gas, an intermediary chemical used in manufacturing urethanes and polycarbonate plastics that also was used as a chemical weapon in World War I. The gas seemed to be headed to the nearby Lion Copolymer chemical plant. That company's employees were instructed to shelter in place. At Rubicon, two contractor employees were sent to first aid for observation after their phosgene exposure badges indicated positive readings. They were later allowed to return to work.
- **July 5, 2011:** A contract worker was exposed to aniline while performing maintenance

work for about a minute. He was initially unaware of the exposure, but he then reported to the company first-aid station and was transferred to a local hospital and treated for cyanosis. He was released the next morning. Less than a pound of aniline was released in the incident.

- **July 27, 2011:** A valve on a hazardous waste tank transfer line was inadvertently opened, releasing diphenylamine tars within a containment area, causing a vapor cloud. A contractor employee was exposed and reported to Rubicon first aid for observation.
- **May 23, 2012:** Contractor Ryan Housley was exposed to aniline while doing maintenance. He left work at the end of his shift, but returned to the Rubicon first-aid station after showing signs of cyanosis during a college class. He was transported to a local hospital and treated for methemoglobinemia until his hemoglobin levels returned to normal the next day. He was released and allowed to return to work.
- **June 27, 2012:** Three contract workers and one Rubicon worker reported to first aid for observation after hazardous wastewater containing diphenylamine tars and aniline were released during a transfer between waste tanks.
- **Dec. 18, 2012:** A contract pipefitter in full personal protective equipment was

exposed to aniline. The worker showered for 20 minutes, reported to the first-aid station and then was sent to a local hospital, where he was observed for five hours before being released.

- **Jan. 25, 2013:** Employees at nearby Dynamic Fuels evacuated part of their facility because of an ammonia odor coming from the Rubicon facility. No workers reported to first aid stations or local hospitals.
- **March 22, 2013:** A release of polymeric diaminodiphenylmethane, aniline, and hydrochloric acid resulted in exposures of 10 contractors and four Rubicon employees, all of whom reported to the first-aid station for observation. All returned to work with no restrictions.
- **Sept. 24, 2013:** A 32-minute release of aniline and ammonia resulted in 13 contractors reporting to the Rubicon first-aid station for observation. Rubicon personnel downwind of the release also sheltered in place. All contractors returned to work with no restrictions.
- **Dec. 13, 2013:** An employee was burned on his hands and face during a railcar loading accident in which 27 pounds of hydrochloric acid were released into the air and 4,000 pounds of muriatic acid were released into the ground. Workers at a nearby chemical facility sheltered in place

when the acid cloud drifted offsite. The company was fined \$33,000.

- **Feb. 27, 2014:** An equipment seal failure allowed the release of 26 pounds of sulfuric acid, 1 pound of nitrobenzene and 22 pounds of benzene to be released in both vapor and liquid form. A contractor working in the area was exposed to the vapor and reported to Rubicon first aid and then to his contract company's doctor. He was released and returned to work.
- **May 12, 2014:** A switchboard fault caused a power failure in one chemical manufacturing unit, resulting in the release of a half pound of phosgene and seven pounds of hydrochloric acid into the air. Two Westlake Vinyl employees reported to a local hospital for observation only.
- **Sept. 24, 2014:** A disc on a nitrobenzene/acid separator ruptured, releasing 500 pounds of nitrobenzene, 25 pounds of sulfuric acid and 5 pounds of nitrogen oxide to the air and ground. The incident resulted in 44 workers reporting to the first aid station for observation, with three transported to a local hospital for treatment of methemoglobinemia and released. Workers at nearby Renewable Energy Group sheltered in place during the incident.
- **Nov. 14, 2014:** During a contractor's hydroblasting of an obstruction in a

pipeline as part of a “turnaround” of production, a Rubicon employee observing the work was sprayed in the mouth, face and chest with a solution of aniline, diphenylamine and water. The employee cleaned off at a safety shower, was taken to the company first-aid station and was then transported to a local hospital for observation and was later released.

- **April 7, 2015:** A production technician was sprayed with a mixture of aniline, diaminodiphenylmethane and hydrochloric acid when he removed a cap from a vapor recovery system in a chemical unit. The worker used an emergency shower, reported to the company first-aid station and was taken to a local hospital. He was released the next morning when his methemoglobin levels returned to normal. The company estimated that 4 pounds of aniline, 1.4 pounds of hydrochloric acid and a half pound of DADPM were released in liquid form.
- **Aug. 5, 2015:** Liquid aniline spilled from a piece of equipment being removed from an ammonia cooler by a crane at one of the chemical units when the piece of equipment tipped. The chemical landed on an employee’s pant leg and he was sent to the first aid station and then to a local hospital for observation. The employee was released and allowed to return to work.

- **Oct. 29, 2015:** A piece of tubing in a feed pump in a chemical manufacturing unit leaked, releasing a mixture of chlorobenzene and phosgene to the air. About 0.2 pounds of chlorobenzene and 0.8 pounds of phosgene were released into the air and 858 pounds of chlorobenzene and 21 pounds of phosgene were released as liquid to a containment area. One production technician received first- and second-degree burns to his hands and was transported to the Baton Rouge General Burn Unit for treatment. He was released the same day. Three other production technicians also were exposed, reported to the first-aid unit and later returned to work.
- **Nov. 11, 2015:** During maintenance on a power source for one manufacturing unit, the power was shut off, leading to the release of about 10 pounds of phosgene from several tanks. The release resulted in 11 contract workers reporting to the company first aid station for observation only. There was precautionary sheltering-in-place at four nearby schools and four adjacent chemical plants.
- **April 6, 2016:** A leak in a phosgene reactor cooling system tube released a gaseous mixture of phosgene, chlorine and carbon monoxide to the air, exposing eight employees. The exposed employees reported to onsite first aid, and two – a production technician and a contract

employee — were taken to a local hospital emergency room. The technician was treated for phosgene exposure and released. The contractor was briefly held for observation and released. Both returned to work the next day. The other six employees went back to work the same day as the incident. The company later reported that 0.6 pounds of phosgene, 1.5 pounds of chlorine and 0.8 pounds of carbon monoxide was released to the air.

- **April 21, 2016:** A mixture of hydrochloric acid, methylene diphenyl diisocyanate, chlorobenzene and phosgene were released from a valve in a manufacturing unit when a pump was being cleared for routine maintenance. Two Rubicon employees were exposed and reported to the first-aid station. They were later taken to a local hospital and flown by air ambulance to the LSU Health Science Center in Shreveport for further treatment for phosgene exposure. One was also treated for burns. Both were released the next day and cleared to return to work. The company later said chemicals released to the air included 0.62 pounds of phosgene and 0.1 pound of chlorobenzene. Also released in liquid form were 667 pounds of chlorobenzene, 3 pounds of hydrochloric acid, 292 pounds of MDI and 21 pounds of phosgene. Because these were released within a containment area, Rubicon did not have to report it.

- **May 26, 2016:** During maintenance on a tank holding production byproducts, workers discovered a line was plugged and attempted to clear it. Water caused increased pressure and temperature in the tank, and a pressure-relief valve lifted, releasing 1,800 pounds of maleic anhydride vapors into the air. Six neighboring manufacturing facilities instituted shelter-in-place measures at the direction of the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office, which also closed parts of four local roads. Two contractors were treated for eye irritation at the Rubicon first aid station and returned to work.
- **April 12, 2018:** A leaking valve caused a backflow of sodium hydroxide in a water line, exposing a contract pipefitter. The worker showered and was taken to the first-aid station and then to an offsite occupational clinic for examination. He was allowed to return to work.
- **April 9, 2019:** A contractor working on insulation in one of the chemical units became light-headed and reported to the first aid station. Believing the man's blood sugar was high and his oxygen saturation levels low, personnel sent him to an offsite clinic. When his oxygen levels didn't recover, he was sent to Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge, where he was diagnosed as being exposed to what was later identified by the company as aniline, which causes skin to turn blue from

lack of oxygen. The worker was released the next day and allowed to return to work.

- **Dec. 31, 2019:** Officials smelled ammonia in one part of the manufacturing facility and discovered wastewater containing a 12% solution of ammonia and water overflowing from a sump. A worker exposed while responding to the release was checked out at the company's medical unit and transferred to St. Elizabeth Hospital in Gonzales, and later returned to work. While no air monitoring was conducted, the company said there were no offsite impacts from the release of 258 pounds of ammonia.



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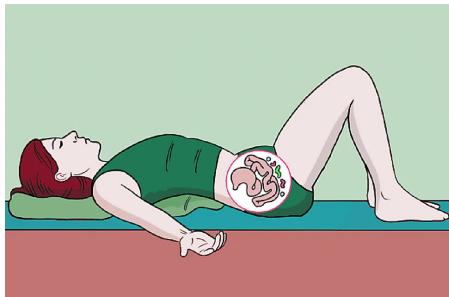
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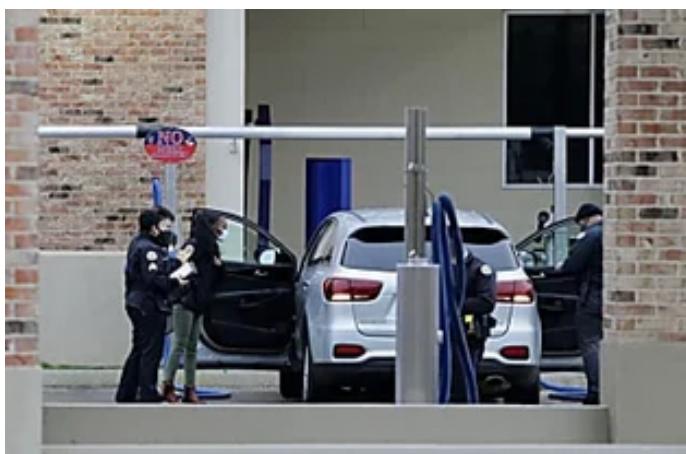
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