

Warped

By Scott McCullar



Grain elevator blast kills five, injures 23

United Press International  
COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa — Firefighters worked Wednesday to douse the flames from an explosion that ripped through a corn and soybean elevator, killing five men and injuring 23 others in the Midwest's worst grain blast on record. The five victims were working inside the Bluffs Elevator Co. Tuesday when a massive explosion tore through the mid-section of the 50-year-old structure with such force that it injured a railroad crew 80 yards away and blew a grain-loading team from the top of a boxcar. Five hours later, authorities abandoned the search for the men trapped inside the flaming structure, which passed a state inspection less than a month ago. "There is too much fire," Assistant Council Bluffs Fire Chief Delbert Burdick said Wednesday. "Anyone inside would have no chance for survival." Police Lt. Ernie Gray said authorities were concerned a

trucker may have been a sixth victim of the blast, but said he may have left before the blast. Authorities said 23 people were hurt and 12 remained hospitalized Tuesday night — two in serious condition. Firefighters doused the smoldering rubble, hoping to cool it down, but said it would be days before the fire is extinguished. Assistant Fire Chief Laverne McKeown said he believed grain dust caused the explosion, adding: "That's what we always assume first in a situation like this." The blast and fire destroyed the elevator's 135-foot-high, tin-covered wooden center. An adjacent shop and office also were destroyed. Gray said the victims, who were not immediately identified, were in an area where trucks are loaded, two others were in the scale house and one was running a conveyor belt. Union Pacific Railroad spokesman Joe McCartney said a 16-man UP track gang was

spiking ties about 80 yards away from the elevator when its mid-section blew up. Authorities at first feared the men, who had been loading a boxcar, were missing in the blast, but they were hospitalized after being blown off it. Maurice Van Nostrand, a spokesman for AGRI Industries in Des Moines, Iowa, which owns the elevator, said damage to the elevator — jammed with corn and soybeans — could be as high as \$10 million. The elevator passed a 1½-day state inspection with no problems March 30, said Wallace Dick, director of the warehouse division of the Iowa Commerce Commission. The inspection was required because AGRI bought the elevator from Enderlin Grain Co. of Enderlin, N.D., Sept. 15, Van Nostrand said.

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