

Warped



by Scott McCullar

Explosion, fire hit company in Texas City

TEXAS CITY (AP) — An explosion apparently set off by a ruptured tank car ripped through a dock complex in this industrial Gulf city Tuesday, injuring several people before it was brought under control, officials said.

At least six fire departments battled the blaze for more than an hour at the Stan-Trans Inc. marine distribution terminal, where the explosion went off about 4 p.m., authorities said.

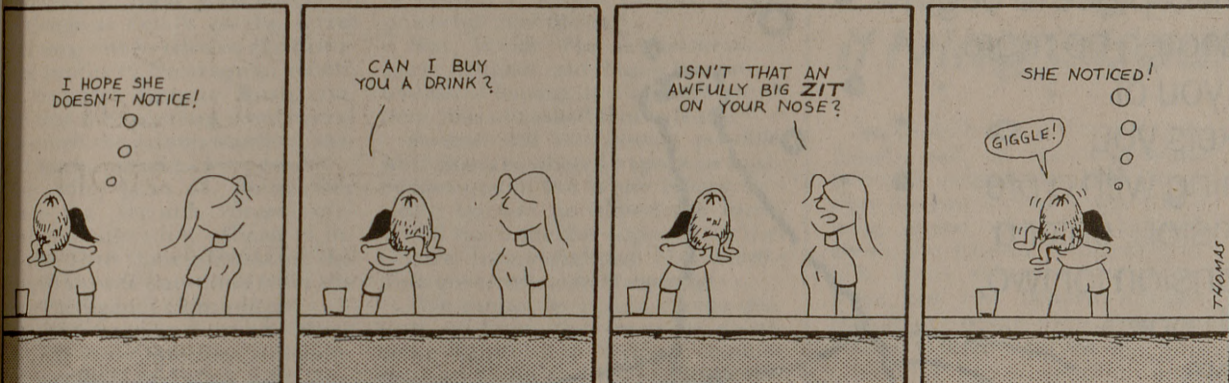
Authorities sealed off the area near the company and evacuated some people.

The explosion and fire occurred in a tank car in a heavily industrial area of Texas City, officials said. It was controlled shortly before 5:30 p.m., officials at the scene reported.

At least one company building caught fire, but firefighters were able to prevent the flames from spreading to the other tank cars, officials said.

Authorities did not know the cause of the explosion, but said the tank cars reportedly carried gasoline.

Waldo



by Kevin Thomas

Louisiana utility panel rejects GSU rate hike

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Gulf States Utilities, which has threatened to go bankrupt if not given a \$100 million rate increase, was turned down Tuesday by the state Public Service Commission.

Gulf States President Linn Draper said that without a rate hike, the utility by March will wind up without enough cash to operate. Draper said the utility probably will appeal the commission's 3-2 vote in court.

The company, which serves about 800,000 customers in Louisiana and Texas, is struggling to pay for its \$4.4 billion nuclear generator at St. Francisville, a facility originally projected to cost about \$380 million.

The utility also is asking the PSC's counterpart in Texas for a \$144 million rate hike to help pay for the River Bend generator.

Commissioner Louis Lambert told GSU officials, "I warned you in the 1970s to stop that construction, to go to coal."

The utility constructed both nuclear and coal-fired plants to service an expected boom in the petrochemical industry that never materialized. The industry has been depressed in recent years and several chemical plants are generating their own electricity because of high energy costs. The PSC was not swayed by Gov.

Edwin Edwards, who strongly urged approval "to avert disaster."

"As governor, it's appalling to me that a utility, any utility, would be allowed to go into bankruptcy," Edwards told the commission.

"Bankruptcy could hurt this state's image," he said.

Draper has said that without higher rates, Gulf States is threatened with becoming the nation's first public utility to go bankrupt since the Great Depression.

A majority of the commission felt the utility could overcome a deficit of over \$240 million in March by selling some of its assets, a move that could keep GSU going until the commission decides on an original rate hike request of \$200 million.

Within the next few years, GSU is expected to ask for roughly \$900 million in rate hikes to offset the cost of the plant — increases that would be phased in over several years.

"I'm not interested in putting anyone into bankruptcy," said Lambert, who led the move to deny the request.

"The utility can find ways to downsize, to sell off some assets. It has four gas-burning units in Port Neches, Texas, that are sitting there. GSU was offered \$40 million for those."

TAES

(Continued from page 1)

in the world to be bitter about his situation. Yet he speaks excitedly and proudly of the things he has kept going and the new programs he has implemented since coming to Brazos County in February.

"We started the first hay association in the state," Mazurkiewicz says. "I re-formed the livestock judging team and took it to state."

"Next week, the 4-H kids are having the first pecan show in Brazos County. We also had the fire ant program. That's pretty good for someone who has only been here for seven months."

Another problem Mazurkiewicz faces is trying to replace two agents who were in Brazos County — one for 26 years and the other for six years. He says this has not eased his workload.

"I came here at a time when the budget cuts were going into effect," Mazurkiewicz says. "It was a bad time to start in a new place. The people kind of stood back and said, 'Let's see what this guy can do.'"

"The key to extension is volunteer leadership and volunteer help, and the volunteer help comes from getting to know the people, but I just haven't had the time for the one-on-one relationships. It's going to be a while before people come in and

say, 'Hey Jim, we're here to help you with this problem.'"

Despite the problems he and his staff are facing, Mazurkiewicz says it's all worth it because he believes in the extension program. He says he just wishes the day had more hours.

"I love adult education," he says. "I think it is rewarding and worthwhile. I also enjoy the kids and working with the 4-H program."

"However, extension is like anything else; you get out of it what you put into it. I don't think there's a service in the state that offers as much as extension does, both for adults and the youth. We have something for everybody."

While he is dismayed about the present situation, Mazurkiewicz refuses to look at it in a negative way.

"The good old days are gone and we're just going to have to make what we've got better," he says. "I much prefer getting out and meeting the people and creating the personal bonds, but for now, it just can't be like that."

"Of the 40,000 people my position affected in some way last year, most only knew me from large, general meetings. They don't know how sincere I am about helping them or how I really feel."

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