

6 workers injured in silo fire at Thermo mine

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5 transported to burn unit in Dallas

A fire and coal dust explosion in a silo at the Luminant's Thermo mine just after 4 p.m. Wednesday resulted in serious injuries to six people.

According to Hopkins County Fire Chief Kevin Yates, a fire had been burning for about a year in the silo. A Luminant contractor had been working to extinguish the fire.

Yates said he had been at the mine Tuesday when contractors had been working to put out the fire up to the point the fire was thought to have been extinguished. Yates said he knew nothing else about the mine until he received the emergency call reporting an industrial type accident.

"I asked for further information and was told several hundred tons of coal and hot material had dropped on top of about five individuals," Yates said. "At that point, I converted in it from a medical call to a fire call knowing about the explosive hazards of coal dust."

The county fire department, along with two volunteer fire departments responded to the Thermo mine site just off County Road 2309.

"When I got there, I found six individuals that had been injured, five of which had been burned and one suffering from coal dust inhalation," Yates said.

In a statement issued Thursday morning, Luminant Energy said the six employees were in the vicinity of an out of service lignite storage silo, where they came into contact with hot debris.

"The workers sustained burns to their hands and legs," the statement said. "They were given immediate treatment at the scene and then transported to Hopkins County Memorial Hospital. One employee was treated and released and the remaining five were transported to Parkland in Dallas where they are listed in stable condition."

Luminant declined to identify the injured employees citing concerns for family privacy and company policy.

Two of the injured were identified by family members.

James Williams was reported in the intensive care unit at Parkland Hospital with burns over 30 to 40 percent of his body and Zach Reeves was said to be in stable condition with burns to his hands and upper body.

A Luminant spokesman said the incident has been reported to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, which is responsible for monitoring compliance with mine safety regulations and is investigating the incident.

Yates said he met with Mine Safety and Health Administration representatives on the site and decided, along with the safety manager and plant operations manager, there was no reason to risk further injury to try and extinguish the fire since the blaze had been isolated within a secure area of the mine.

Although there has been no active mining at Thermo location for months, Luminant plans to resume mining at Thermo in the fall and some activities related to preparing the site to restart active mining have been taking place.