

State bomb squad blows up volatile acid

From "ACID," Page 1

prepare for the worst and hope for the best to happen."

At worst, the explosion could have caused some structural damage to the building, she said, or a hazardous materials spill because of the mix of the chemicals stored in the two rooms where the picric acid was discovered.

McMahan said their plan was to remove at least one container of crystallized picric acid and dispose of it at the Thomas County landfill, keeping in mind that there was a potential for other containers in the lab area and office area to go off. They made plans to secure the area prior to entry and during the trip to the landfill.

The planners issued a general safety message for their team:

"This product in crystalized form is an explosive and corrosive hazard. Responders need to take proper personal protection equipment precautions, stay well hydrated and monitor vitals during response. The transport will take this product through populated areas to disposal site, so extra public protection measures will be taken. Because the product is in a chemistry lab, the potential of explosion could generate other hazardous products due to other chemicals in the lab."

College officials said they didn't want to panic the students, or the town, so they did not announce the problem.

"To avoid panic among students and parents," Kaaz said, "the college issued a press release on Thursday that there would be an

emergency exercise at the college on Monday morning. The building itself was locked up.

"However, custodial staff were told to not enter the area, and the keys were not in the hands of anyone else who had keys to the secured sites."

On Monday, McMahan told the county commissioners her office was issuing a press release that said: "On June 14, 2010, there will be numerous responding agencies at Colby Community College. The community college personnel found in their lab, in Thomas Hall, picric acid in an unstable dehydrated state which can be an explosive hazard. The amount of the product is small but requires the Kansas State Fire Marshal's Explosive Unit to remove and dispose of the product.

"Local emergency responders are supporting the removal and disposal operation and are also using this incident as an opportunity to train and test the county emergency operations plan and response procedures. The risk to the community is extremely low. Please respect the restricted area and emergency personnel working in the area."

Kaaz said on Monday, the college secured the administration building, Thomas Hall, the Health Sciences building and the A.F. Davis Library. Classes were moved to the Bedker Memorial building at the south end of the campus.

Kaaz said after he had talked with the chemistry instructor, he (Kaaz) went back into the room and tagged the containers with orange stickers for quick identification by the state team.

He added that the state team praised the county personnel for their actions and said they were impressed with the plan they had formulated and with the way they had organized the removal of the chemicals.

"We went to the college on Monday morning," McLemore said. "Barry unlocked the doors and the bomb squad removed the chemicals in three trips, with the white phosphorus coming out last."

Chief McLemore and McMahan said a county dump truck was sent to the college with about a half load of sand on it. The chemical was put in the sand to cushion and stabilize the picric acid on its way to the disposal site. The white phosphorus was transported in a special trailer with a cone shaped compartment designed so that if there is an explosion, it would direct the force upward. The trailer was pulled to the landfill by a separate vehicle.

"We left the college at 11:45 a.m.," McLemore said.

Landfill Director Larry Jumper said his instructions were to clear a site that would leave 500 feet in all directions for a safety zone. Jumper said he measured the site

in all directions and with a loader, made a pad for the chemicals and marked it with flags.

McLemore said the state bomb squad dug a shallow hole in the pad, then deposited the chemicals. They placed an explosive called PETN (an acronym for a \$700 word) around the chemicals, plus a detonation cord that was set off with an initiator device. The squad moved back to the safety zone and the countdown began.

After one loud boom, and a cloud of black smoke, and then a second bang, the crew waited for a few minutes and returned to check the site. All the chemicals had been destroyed, Jumper said, but the phosphorus continued to burn for just a little while.

McMahan said the operation involved nine members of the Colby Fire Department, two from the county road department, one from emergency management, three from the ambulance crew, four from the Colby Police, two from the sheriff's office, one from the landfill, four from the state fire marshal's office and one from the college.

"This was a great exercise for everyone who works with emergencies," McMahan said. "The communications were excellent, and we had an action plan in place ... but luckily didn't have to use it."

"I make the plans, and they do all the work."

Seniority is key, says state legislator

From "MORRISON," Page 1

That tax, he said, is enough of an increase that area businesses are no longer competitive with Burlington, Colo., or McCook, Neb. He said he has already heard of people going across the border to buy high-priced items like recreational vehicles because the sales tax is less.

"It's even worse in Kansas City," he said. "Missouri has very low taxes."

Morrison said the state could save a lot of money by decentralizing its agencies, placing more offices in towns around the state, dismantling some of the Topeka offices and selling the buildings.

Morrison said the state could also sell off assets it uses little or maintains at a loss. For example, it could sell or lease the right-of-way around highway overpasses to farmers. The state could also sell the fiber optic cables that are

currently used for running highway hazard signs to Internet providers.

Sometimes, he said, he votes the way his constituents want instead of how he himself wants. Morrison said he believes he is supposed to work for his constituents and do what the majority of them want.

"The leadership doesn't like that," he said, "but they know I'll do that."

Morrison said that while he doesn't come back to the district more than a few times during each session, he spends a lot of time on the phone with his constituents.

"People here have brilliant ideas," he said, "and they work in most instances - with a little balancing wire."

Morrison said he gets quite a few angry calls, but many are angry at the state rather than at him.

"Most people dislike politics," he said. "I don't blame them."

New voice needed, says the challenger

From "McCANTS," Page 1

very well," she said. "We need skilled laborers."

The state budget was the big issue in the Legislature this year. McCants said creating a budget is a challenge and she would take a common-sense approach.

"What would I do if I was short of money?" she asked.

McCants said she would cut until only essential budget items were left. Beyond that, she said, she wants to find out what the needs of district are.

"I'm not afraid to go out and ask," she said. "It's easy to say what they need based on your perspective. We see that now in the education cuts."

McCants said she has enjoyed campaigning so far, especially getting out and meeting people.

"It's a new journey for sure," she said. "It's made me become more aware of where I stand on the issues."

Those include abortion, which she opposes.

"I have two adopted children," she said. "I'm so grateful to that mother who chose that option."

She said she favors the death penalty, but that it should not be a decision made lightly.

McCants said she is always available to answer any questions her constituents have.

"It says a lot when you can pick up the phone and call your legislator," she said.

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Weather Corner



National Weather Service

Tonight: Mostly clear, with a low around 66. Breezy, with a south wind between 20 and 25 mph, with gusts as high as 35 mph.

Thursday: Sunny, with a high near 96. Breezy, with a south-west wind between 15 and 20 mph, with gusts as high as 30 mph.

Thursday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 60. North northwest wind around 10 mph.

Friday: Sunny, with a high near 91. North wind 10 to 15 mph becoming east southeast.

Friday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 63.

Saturday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 93.

Saturday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Partly cloudy, with a low around 63.

Sunday: Partly cloudy, with a high near 95.

Sunday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Partly cloudy, with a low around 67.

Monday: Partly cloudy, with a high near 93.

Monday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Partly cloudy, with a low around 62.

Tuesday: Partly cloudy, with a high near 91.

Table with weather data: Monday: High, 72; Low 50; Tuesday: High, 85; Low 58; Precip: Monday Trace; Tuesday 0.00 inches; Month: 2.73 inches; Year: 10.29 inches; Normal: 9.94 inches (K-State Experiment Station)

Sunrise and Sunset

Thursday 6:14 a.m. 9:14 p.m. (U.S. Naval Observatory)

Colby Water Use

Monday 1,414,000 gal. Tuesday 1,497,000 gal. (Colby Public Works)

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LOCAL TV LISTINGS sponsored by the COLBY FREE PRESS

Table with TV listings for Thursday Evening (June 17, 2010) and Friday Evening (June 18, 2010) including channels like KAKE/ABC, KBSL/CBS, KSNK/NBC, KAS/FOX, Cable Channels, and Premium Channels.

Table with American Profile listings for Friday Evening (June 18, 2010) including shows like Valkyrie-Hitler, Reba, True Life, Big Time, Eragon, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, etc.