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120 sickened by ammonia leak at Ala. plant

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Enlarge By Bill Stirling, AP

At least 120 people were sickened after a refrigeration facility leaked up to 300 gallons of ammonia into the air in south Alabama.

THEODORE, Ala. (AP) — Authorities say more than 120 people were sickened by the leak of ammonia at an Alabama plant, and four are in intensive care.

Hospital officials at Mobile say 29 have been admitted, including the four in intensive care. Many of those sickened were part of BP's oil spill cleanup crew on the Alabama coast.

The leak was reported about 9:25 a.m. at Millard Refrigerated Services, which uses ammonia in the refrigeration process at a plant on the Theodore Industrial Canal, south of Mobile. The complex is located near an area where BP PLC workers have been helping with the cleanup from the Gulf oil spill, said Capt. Shaun Hicks of the Mobile Fire-Rescue Department.

Between 400 gallons and 800 gallons of ammonia leaked at the site, sickening workers both in the Millard facility and others at the BP staging area in Theodore, said Hicks. Most reported minor breathing problems, scratchy throats or dizziness, he said.

"They were walking wounded, but they were still having respiratory problems," said Hicks.

Hospital officials and authorities said more than 100 people were treated, including at least 50 transported by emergency services. Some went by private vehicle.

Emergency officials made telephone calls to alert area residents within one mile of the spill to remain inside and turn off their air conditioners because of the spill, and children were kept inside an elementary school that was within the danger zone.

The leak was stopped by plant workers, Hicks said, and residents were told it was again safe to go outside.



Hicks said it was unclear what caused the leak, and a company spokesman did not immediately return a telephone message.

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