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U.S. power plant blast triggers fears in Oakville

Residents fear repeat of fatal explosion at proposed power plant

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Patty Winsa
Urban Affairs Reporter

An Oakville citizens' group says the explosion at a 620-megawatt gas-fired power plant in Connecticut that killed five highlights the hazards of building a similar power station in their neighbourhood.

"It's one of those things that confirms the possibilities of the dangers of having a plant in a residential community," said Daniela Morawetz, president of the Chartwell-Maple Grove Residents Association, an Oakville ratepayers association of 1,600 homeowners located next door to the future site of Canada's largest gas-fired power plant.

"This one is 400 metres from homes and schools," said Morawetz.



Roy Rushton of Hamilton, seen above right with his wife, Patty, died in the Feb. 7, 2010 explosion at the Kleen Energy Systems power plant in Middletown, Conn.

BETTINA HANSEN, THE HARTFOURD COURANT/AP FILE PHOTO (left),

SUPPLIED PICTURE

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"If something like that happened here, it would be catastrophic."

Sunday's explosion at the plant under construction in Middletown, Conn., killed five employees, including Roy Rushton, a 36-year-old Hamilton man.

Rushton, a married father of a 4-year-old girl, was installing insulation around gas-fired turbines when he was killed.

He and apprentice Adam Young, 26, also from Hamilton, were on their last day of work at the plant. Moments before the explosion, Rushton sent Young to another part of the plant.

Young was uninjured.

"Roy sent Adam away at just the right moment and saved his life, and Roy took the brunt," said Rushton's wife, Patty Dean-Rushton.

The explosion at the site was described as a "thundering blast" and shook houses 30 kilometres away.

"The (Oakville) plant will be located next to a rail line," said Morawetz. "If something like that happened here, it would be an incredible disaster. It confirms that things like this can and do happen."

Despite residents' vocal opposition, the province announced last fall the 900-megawatt gas-fired plant would be built on land next to the Ford Motor Co. manufacturing plant, at Ford Dr. and the QEW.

Residents founded the ratepayers association to fight the plan, and formed Citizens for Clean Air, a coalition of citizens' groups in Mississauga and Oakville.

The coalition is encouraging residents to attend an open house Wednesday at the Oakville Conference and Banquet Centre held by energy giant TransCanada.

The group will also hold a protest at Queen's Park on March 2.

The plant is expected to be operational by 2013.

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