

MEXICO - Accident

Date: November 19, 1984

Location: Ten km north of Mexico City

No. Dead: 452

No. Affected: 31,000 homeless, 4,248 injured

Damage: 65 acres of residential buildings razed, electricity to the capital city threatened, gas storage facilities destroyed

The Disaster

A series of violent explosions and subsequent fires claimed 452 lives, injured 4,248 residents, and razed almost 24 hectares of slum dwellings outside of Mexico City on November 19 in the worst industrial accident in Mexico's history.

The first explosion occurred at about 5:30 a.m. near the natural gas holding tanks of PEMEX, the state oil monopoly, and several private gas distribution companies. This was quickly followed by a string of at least ten subsequent explosions as storage tanks and distribution facilities ignited one after another, shaking the earth more than a kilometer away. As many as 31,000 residents of the surrounding area were left homeless. At least 1,000 houses were destroyed and many others damaged by the ensuing fire; over 100,000 people were evacuated from the area. In all, four storage tanks containing more than 11.4 million liters of liquified gas erupted. Two additional million liter tanks caught fire and burned but did not explode. By mid-afternoon, the fire was brought under control and workers began the task of recovering bodies from the rubble.

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Action Taken by the Government of Mexico (GOM)

The GOM and the Mexican Red Cross were on the scene immediately following the explosions. Ambulances shuttled the wounded and injured to seven area hospitals, while the Red Cross issued calls for blood, plasma, and medical supplies. Hundreds of people responded to appeals for blankets, clothing, food, and other supplies for the homeless.

A national commission composed of representatives of the Health Ministry, the Secretaries of National Defense and Urban and Ecological Development, and the Governor of the State of Mexico established an account at the National Bank for the relief of disaster victims. Contributions totaling \$1,697,416 were received, of which \$1,428,571 was from the federal government, \$238,095 was from the state, and \$78,370 from private donations.

The prompt response of the Mexican government at the local, state and national levels, along with the outpouring of public generosity and the on-site efforts of Red Cross and relief workers, provided rapid relief to victims of the explosions and fires.

Action Taken by the United States Government

Upon learning of the early morning explosion which claimed so many lives, U.S. Ambassador John Gavin contacted the Mexican Foreign Minister, the Interior Ministry, and the Office of the President to offer U.S. assistance. Although the Mexican government did not require any direct assistance, the Ambassador announced that the United States was ready to help in any way possible.

On November 21, Ambassador Gavin declared that a state of disaster existed in Mexico. As an expression of solidarity of the people of the United States with the Mexican people, the Ambassador presented a check in the amount of 5,250,000 pesos (\$25,000) to the president of the National System for Family Development Affairs for relief programs for victims of the fires.

TOTAL	\$25,000
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Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

Offers of relief assistance were received from many U.S. cities, organizations, and individuals. All were encouraged to make cash contributions to the Mexican relief effort through the account established at the National Bank.

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Assistance Provided by the International Community

None reported