



# POST-EXPLOSION PATIENT SURGE

## Local ER treats about 100 patients following TPC explosion

Residents living in close proximity to the TPC plant in Port Neches were ripped from slumber as an explosion rocked their homes at about 1 a.m. on Nov. 27, and some were even struck by shards of glass propelled into houses by the force of the blast. A seemingly endless plume of black smoke billowed upward into the sky and the shockwave of at least one additional explosion could be felt throughout Southeast Texas following the initial blast.

As emergency crews responded to the event, injured business owners, employees, homeowners and family members were heading to The Medical Center of Southeast Texas, the closest local hospital available to those in the blast zone and evacuation area designated following the explosions. Emergency Room Director Katie Marioneaux, RN, and numerous other hospital staff, some of whom were impacted themselves, responded to The Medical Center to treat about 100 people who came into the ER in the 12 hours following the explosion.

“The Medical Center of Southeast Texas is approximately six miles from

the actual explosion, which happened in the middle of the night,” she said. “We were the only full-service hospital (in the proximity) available at that time. It was a very humbling experience but, like every night, we were ready. The response from the medical staff was swift and seamless. We’re definitely used to all types of emergencies and disasters, but usually on a much smaller scale.”

TPC Group released multiple statements following the initial and subsequent explosions, and thousands of Southeast Texas residents were ordered to shelter in place at various times in the next week, with some even missing Thanksgiving gatherings as the holiday came and went while air monitoring showed dangerous levels of butadiene. Butadiene, also known as 1,3-Butadiene, is a chemical made from the processing of petroleum, according to the National Center for Biotechnology Information. It is a colorless gas with a mild gasoline-like odor. Acute exposure to butadiene can cause irritation of the eyes, nasal passages and throat. At very high concentrations,

inhalation of this gas can result in headache, fatigue, decreased blood pressure and pulse rate, central nervous system damage and unconsciousness. It is also known to be a human carcinogen.

Marioneaux said The Medical Center treated three men injured in the initial explosion, employees working at the plant who were reportedly treated and released the same day. Staff also treated a lot of patients checking into the ER who had cuts from shattered glass and difficulty breathing.

“We saw a lot of glass injuries from windows blowing in,” she described, “and some patients had respiratory complaints, especially people who have COPD.”

She said more information on the chemical and symptoms of exposure to butadiene could be found by reading the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) information available online. Anyone who thinks they have been exposed to the chemical should seek treatment.

The Medical Center of Southeast Texas, a Steward Family Hospital, is located at 2555 Jimmy Johnson Blvd. in Port Arthur.

— Sharon Brooks