

Questions come in ethanol plant fire

Were firefighters given a late start?



(ABC12 Image)

By [Terry Camp](#)

Caro — (05/19/04)--The fire is out, but questions remain about the blaze at the Caro Ethanol Plant.

The fire started Monday and was finally extinguished Tuesday morning. New details about how the fire was fought are coming out, and there's concern the local fire departments were given a late start in putting out the flames.

ABC12's Terry Camp had more.

In all, eight fire departments battled the blaze. Three firefighters and three workers at the plant were treated for heat exhaustion or smoke inhalation. The big question for investigators now is, when did the fire start?

Caro Fire Chief Dave Mattlin was one of about 50 firefighters on the scene for 16 hours at the Michigan Ethanol Plant.

Mattlin is now concerned plant officials may not have called the fire department when the blaze was first discovered. The first call to Tuscola County Central Dispatch was at about 2 p.m. Monday.

Mattlin says the plant does not have any trained firefighting personnel at the facility, and a delay in calling his department could have hindered the ability to fight the flames. An explosion also shook the nerves of firefighters.

As far as the fire not being called in when it first broke out, plant manager Tony Simpson said an investigation has started looking into the sequence of events in regard to the fire. He applauded firefighters' efforts.

Mattlin says this is the third fire his department has fought at the plant since it opened more than a year and a half ago. Some residents near the plant have filed a lawsuit against the village of Caro and the plant.

Among their complaints is that it's a safety hazard. Patty Woodard manages mobile home park across from the ethanol plant. She's not a plaintiff in the lawsuit, but she has concerns over this latest fire.

We've also found out there was some disagreement over whether more help was needed to fight the fire. We're told plant officials asked Mattlin to bring in another ladder truck, but Mattlin disagreed, saying 10 ladder trucks wouldn't have been much help in fighting a fire like this one.

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