

Forensic Files

New London Natural Gas Disaster



By: Heather Pressler

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Picture of the volunteers looking for survivors

Close to the end of a normal school day while children and teachers were finishing up their lessons a leak in the natural gas pipe had filled the unventilated basement below them with pounds of the odorless, explosive gas. Reportedly, at 3:05pm, a spark from a woodshop sander triggered the massive explosion that killed nearly 300 people instantly. Survivors later noted that when children walked into the auditorium they would regularly kick the main natural gas pipeline leading into the basement.



The scene at the school

One of the primary causes for the explosion and fire was that the natural gas used in the building was unprocessed natural gas which is virtually odorless. Within a few weeks of this accident, the Texas legislature enacted new regulations requiring all utility gas be odorized so that leaks could be more easily detected. Today natural gas and propane are odorized with the strong odor of ethyl mercaptan (a sulfurous odor).

**Questions? Email Thomas Pressler:
tpressler@presslereng.com**



Picture of the schoolhouse after the explosion



18702 North Creek Parkway, Suite 213
Bothell, WA 98011
Phone: (425) 485-3002
Fax: (425) 485-8114
www.PresslerEng.com