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Warehouse Explosion Kills Cancer Scientist

April 16, 1995 - 10:13 a.m. ET

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ET Salt Lake City Fire Department rescuers are still searching a destroyed warehouse for victims after a fire and apparent explosion killed at least five people and injured more than 2 others authorities said.

The cause is being investigated, but early reports suggest a possible chemical or oxygen detonation. Reports of gunfire were reported to local authorities at approximately 8:22am, just moments before the explosion. Among the victims was Soviet research scientist Dr. Leonard Kendall, 58 years old, of Ingen Bio Corporation.

Fire officials said no measurable amounts of harmful chemicals or radioactivity were released in the explosion, however they believe the warehouse was being used by Dr. Kendall for conducting offsite experiments for medical research.

Edward Hazelton, spokesperson for Ingen Bio said today that the surviving officer, Garret Thorne, told investigators an oxygen pressure-release valve was not functioning properly on a containment dome being used in an experiment and that the explosion occurred when Dr. Kendall tried to release the pressure manually. There was not explanation as to why the Ingen Bio officer was at the offsite location when the incident occurred.

In a statement from Ingen Bio CEO/President, Dr. Harlan Griffin told reporters "We are deeply saddened at the loss of Dr. Leonard Kendall. This was a tragedy for our company, and his memory lives on in the research we continue everyday." Ingen Bio has promised full cooperation with the local investigation. City authorities said the company's onsite safety procedures were regularly reviewed and passed inspection every time, however they are unclear why the scientist was working offsite.

As of yet there is no explanation for what caused the explosions and as to why in excess of 100 tons of high explosive oxygen and combustible chemicals were stored in a residential area.