NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

38 Firefighters, 3 Others Hurt in Blast



Newsday Photo / Mayita Mendez

Rescuers aide an injured firefighter after an explosion on Water Street in lower Manhattan yesterday.

By Sean Gardiner
STAFF WRITER

A boiler explosion in an office high-rise on Manhattan's southern tip yesterday sent 38 firefighters and three workers to hospitals for treatment, including four firefighters who were admitted to a specialized burn unit.

Workers at One New York Plaza on Water Street said a sub-basement blaze that firefighters were attempting to put out touched off an explosion at about 1:20 p.m., powerful enough to blow down a 16-inch-thick, double cinderblock wall and send them hurtling through the air.

"There was this big explosion," said Michael Ward, 33, a carpenter working in the room next to where the boiler blew up. "It threw me six feet. We ran out of there. Things were falling from the ceiling, bricks were flying, there was so much smoke you really couldn't see anything."

A Fire Department official said last night that four firefighters were admitted to the burn unit at New York Weill Cornell Center in Manhattan and that 34 others were sent to other hospitals for treatment. Three civilians who had been working on the boiler also were injured. The Fire Department official did not know the extent of the injuries.

Frank Gribbon, the deputy fire commissioner in charge of the Office of Public Information, did not return calls.

Ward and fellow carpenters said that workers using welding equipment were removing an old boiler in the sub-basement when a fire started. Ward and John Paulsen, 25, another carpenter, who were in an adjacent room with co-workers putting up protection walls, said they tried in vain to help the welders put out the fire with a water hose before they called the Fire Department.

Paulsen said he and others thought the firefighters had been able to quickly douse the blaze.

"We thought they [firefighters] had it under control, then all of a sudden there was this explosion," Paulsen said.

Several firefighters in the sub-basement were injured in the blast, including one who had to be carried out by other firefighters, Paulsen said.

In the aftermath of the World Trade Center terrorist attacks in which 343 firefighters were killed, word of more firefighters being injured prompted a massive response.

More than two dozen Fire Department vehicles were on the site yesterday, with some traveling from as far as Harlem and others coming across the Brooklyn Bridge from Brooklyn.

NEWSDAY, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2001

CITY_21MC100_01183624

NYC-WTC_000415435