

Fire blackens skies over port

By Ryan Anderson
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A heat transfer fluid oil fire erupted Saturday afternoon in a heater at the Haltermann facility on Jacinto Port Boulevard and Sheldon Road filling the afternoon sky with a huge plume of black smoke that could be seen for miles.

"We got the call around 2:30 p.m. and when we got here the smoke was shooting hundreds of feet into the air," said Port of Houston police officer J. Avalos.

Firefighters from Highlands, Channelview, Galena Park, Sheldon, Cloverleaf and Pasadena joined firefighters from over 15 departments in responding to the blaze after a call for assistance was sent out over the Channel Industries Mutual Aid (CIMA) network.

The fire appeared to be under control around 4 p.m. as the smoke turned from black to gray however, the fire flared up again before finally being extinguished around 6 p.m.

There were no injuries reported during the fire and a voluntary evacuation was in effect for Haltermann personnel and workers at neighboring facilities.

"We had planned on staying put but then the wind shifted and the smoke started blowing our way," said Roy Waugh, who works next to the Haltermann facility. "They pretty much had the fire contained from the get go, but the smoke was another story."

Although a shelter in place had been ordered for anyone within a mile of the plant, according to Haltermann officials, there was not anything toxic in the smoke from the synthetic oil blaze.

"Smoke generated by the fire contained normal combustion products such as carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide," said Gary Spaid, Environmental Health and Safety Leader. "We asked for the shelter in place order in case the fire spread to other parts of the facility."

The shelter in place notice was lifted at 6 p.m.

Haltermann Incorporated is a subsidiary of Dow Chemical. The company produces hydrocarbon based solvents that are used by chemical, automotive, cosmetic, graphic arts, pharmaceutical and automotive industries.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.