

Huge fire at SEMASS plant in Rochester

http://www.capecodtoday.com/blogs/index.php/CWN/2007/03/31/3_alarm_fire_in_dennis

ROCHESTER - A general alarm fire broke out late Friday evening at the trash to energy SEMASS plant in Rochester, MA. Multiple tankers and engines were on scene and drafting was taking place from a nearby pond. So many units were called that a task force which included an engine from Bourne was called for from the Cape. Residents of parts of Plymouth and Bristol counties are being advised to shut and tape their windows to keep smoke drifting through the region from seeping in. Trash from Cape Cod is routinely hauled to the plant. Read WHDH-TV story with video and photo [here](#). Read more about the impact of the fire in our "[Extra](#)" blog. Monday Massachusetts State Fire Marshall Stephen Coan together with Rochester Fire Chief Scott Ashworth told CWN how they believed the fire started and issued a warning for people throwing out trash. Coan told CWN, "The fire was caused by an explosion in one of the shredders." He added, "Investigators have ruled out any intentional act." Coan added, "Apparently someone inappropriately threw away an item such as a small propane or butane tank. These pressurized cylinders cannot be sent to an incinerator and it usually says so right on the container." He added, "Plant staff has pulled many similar inappropriate items from the trash in the past such as LP-gas grill cylinders, preventing many similar incidents. I would ask citizens across the Commonwealth to dispose of this kind of refuse safely and properly."

SEMASS blaze among biggest faced by local fire departments

<http://www.southcoasttoday.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070405/PUB01/704050435>



A DANGEROUS BLAZE: Fire crews responding to calls at PJ Keating on South Main Street found themselves dealing with these massive plumes of smoke nearly 100 feet off the ground.

April 05, 2007 6:00 AM

By MICHAEL MEDEIROS

ACUSHNET/FAIRHAVEN — The past week was a challenging one for the Acushnet and Fairhaven fire departments.

While both crews were involved in putting out a fire at the PJ Keating gravel quarry on Thursday, it was their participation in a huge cooperative endeavor over the weekend at the SEMASS Resource Recovery Facility in Rochester that really proved taxing.

"It was the largest incident I've ever been a part of," said Acushnet Fire Chief Kevin Gallagher. "It's the first time I've seen a ladder truck from Brockton supplied with water from a Mashpee engine. There was a considerable amount of resources there."

The SEMASS fire took nearly 24 hours to put out, and by the time it was done the plant, which takes waste from over 60 towns and uses it to create energy, had sustained extensive damage that has closed it down for the foreseeable future.

"We were called in at 7:21 p.m. on Saturday night. Initially we were called to cover the Rochester fire station, but we were redirected to the scene. We were committed there until 6:30 p.m. on Sunday night. Fifteen members of the department were there over three shifts," said Chief Gallagher.

According to Fairhaven Fire Chief Timothy Francis, his squad spent roughly nine hours in Rochester fighting the fire.

"That's one of the biggest I've seen in a long time other than fires in the Fall River or New Bedford mills," he said.

On arriving at the scene, firefighters were greeted by the sight of huge, black plumes of smoke and the knowledge that the fire had spread through nearly every part of the four-acre building complex. SEMASS officials believe the fire started in a shredder, but it could not be confined to that area by staff. That led them to contact Rochester's fire department, which realized quickly they were outmatched.

Despite the size of the blaze and the numbers of firefighters on the scene, no one suffered a major injury.

"It was essentially an enclosed dump, and there was no sense in risking anybody's life to put out a garbage fire," said Chief Gallagher, who noted that the Acushnet tanker truck, which holds 1,800 gallons, made over 35 refilling trips over the course of 24 hours. "That means we moved about 63,000 gallons of water that day. I asked several veteran members of the department, and no one remembers doing that before."

The PJ Keating fire on March 29, too, was an unusual one, said the chief. The fire started on the huge hopper, a familiar sight for those who pass the plant on Main St and can see it towering over the quarry. Chief Gallagher noted that that particular portion of the plant was just starting production for the year, and an ember from a cutting torch ignited rubber which was used in the preparations. The fire department responded at 4 p.m. and found a daunting task in front of them.

"That's 75 to 100 feet off the ground. The winds just fed that fire very fast. We fought in a defensive mode," said Chief Gallagher.

Fairhaven played a crucial role in fighting that fire, as their ladder truck enabled crews to get hoses up high. Acushnet does not own this kind of a truck.

"It was a little tricky because of the machinery part of it," said Chief Francis. "We did this with caution, and placed the truck where we hoped we wouldn't be in any danger."

The hopper sustained some structural damage, including severe damage to some steel support beams, and it is uncertain when Keating will be up and running again as usual. The company did not return calls placed by The Advocate before deadline.

In a sidebar to these events, Chief Gallagher noted that Mattapoisett had sent an engine company to the Acushnet station during the Keating blaze to provide coverage. While there, they were called upon to fight a small brush fire on St. Lawrence Street, and while leaving town they came across a motor vehicle accident on Mendell Road.

"It was a busy day for them too," said Chief Gallagher.

SEMASS closure not expected to affect towns' waste plans

<http://www.southcoasttoday.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070402/NEWS/704020329/0/TOWN>

By [Lauren Daley](#) and Curt Brown

Standard-Times staff writer

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Covanta Energy officials are telling town officials not to panic about trash pile-up.

Although the SEMASS waste and recycling facility in Rochester was all but destroyed in a weekend fire, officials say there will be no disruption in services.

Stephen Diaz, vice president and regional business manager at Covanta Energy, based in Fairfield, N.J., said they will send the waste to facilities in Haverhill and Preston, Conn.

"It will be seamless and there will be no disruption," Mr. Diaz said last night.

"We have a plan for every municipality. We will make it seamless for them. It will be business as usual."

SEMASS is a waste-to-energy facility that serves 60 towns in Southeastern Massachusetts, including all of Cape Cod.

A massive fire erupted after an explosion Saturday night in the garbage shredder at the Rochester plant.

Firefighters from six communities poured water on the building on Cranberry Highway; smoke could be seen from Interstate 495.

The 60 communities with waste contracts with SEMASS include Acushnet, Berkley, Bourne, Carver, Fairhaven, Freetown, Lakeville, Marion, Mattapoisett, Middleboro, Rochester and Wareham.

SEMASS shreds and burns about 1 million tons of waste annually to produce electricity, which it sells to N-Star.

N-Star spokeswoman JoAnne O'Leary said yesterday there were no reported outages and she did not expect bills to increase.

Many of the officials from the affected SouthCoast towns were in a state of near panic yesterday, and said they had emergency meetings planned for today.

"To have it go off line for a short time, never mind a long time, will have a serious, serious impact on area communities," said Lawrence N. Ashley, Freetown selectmen chairman.

He said the Freetown selectmen had a meeting planned to discuss options today.

Rochester Selectman Dan McGaffey said Rochester selectmen are meeting today with SEMASS officials, the town attorney and insurance agents.

"Until we do that, there's nothing I can say. It won't be painless, I could say that."

Middleboro Town Manager Jack Healey said there's no cause to panic.

"If the plant is down for any reason, the bypass waste goes to (another) landfill. As far as I know, there should be no impact under our contract."

Still, officials in Lakeville and Acushnet said they were going to hold emergency meetings today.

Covanta officials said last night they can't even speculate when the SEMASS plant will be operational until they have an opportunity to assess the damage. That process is expected to start this morning.

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Fire breaks out in Rochester at a waste treatment plant

<http://www3.whdh.com/news/articles/local/BO47641/ROCHESTER>



ROCHESTER, Mass. -- A fierce firefight in Rochester as a fire breaks out at a waste treatment plant.

The flames broke out just after 8 tonight at American Ref-Fuel Operations of SEMASS, which burns a lot of trash. The fire quickly grew to six-alarms and could be seen and smelled from as far away as Plymouth.

Firefighters from six fire departments have scrambled to get it under control.

People from the area have come to see the fire.

The sheriff's office has asked neighbors in Rochester and Plymouth to tape up their doors and windows because the smoke is toxic.

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SEMASS facility shut down by fire

— A fire at the SEMASS Resource Recovery Facility — which burned and smoldered for 24 hours — caused extensive damage to the plant and required the aid of firefighters from across the region to extinguish... At 10:30 a.m. yesterday, the fire was contained and the state Department of Environmental Protection reported air samples showed no hazards to air quality. DEP said it will continue to monitor the situation.

As of yesterday afternoon, the fire was still burning and there was a heavy odor of smoke in the air. The fire was completely out about 7 last night, according to Stephen Diaz, vice president and regional business manager at Covanta Energy of Fairfield, N.J., the plant operator... "We're on our way back and the most important thing is that no one was hurt," he said... Read the rest of this