

Blast fears over flooded Texas chemical plant

BY AGENCIES

USA. A chemical plant near the flooded US city of Houston is expected to explode and catch fire in the coming days. During heavy rainfall from Hurricane Harvey, the Arkema plant at Crosby lost the ability to refrigerate chemical compounds that need to be kept cool.

There was no way to prevent an explosion, the company said.

At least 33 people have been killed in the aftermath of the storm, which the US National Weather Service has now downgraded to a tropical depression.

It has forecast continuing heavy rainfall over eastern Texas and western Louisiana. US energy supplies have been hit, as oil companies shut down refineries in the Houston area.

Firefighters begun a door-to-door search of badly flooded areas of Houston yesterday, to rescue survivors who were still stranded and recover the bodies of those who have died.

"We'll be doing block-by-block, door-by-door search of streets... to make sure there are no people we've left behind," Richard Mann, the city's assistant fire chief, was quoted as saying by the *Houston Chronicle* newspaper.

“Any fire will probably resemble a large gasoline fire. The fire will be explosive and intense.”

RICHARD ROWE, ARKEMA CHEMICAL PLANT CEO.

"This will be a one- to two-week-long process to make sure we address all those areas that have been... most impacted."

The Arkema chemical plant shut down its production last Friday, before the storm made landfall.

But 40in (102cm) of rainfall in the area flooded the site and cut off its power, the company said in a statement. Back-up generators were also flooded.

The facility manufactures organic peroxides, compounds that are used in everything from making pharmaceuticals to construction materials, which can become dangerous at higher temperatures.

"Any fire will probably resemble a large gasoline fire," CEO Richard Rowe said, adding: "The fire will be explosive and intense."

He said the black smoke produced would irritate skin, eyes and lungs.

"The high water that exists on site, and the lack of power, leave us with no way to prevent it."