

CLEANING AFTER A *CRISIS*

The rapid response after a deadly hospital explosion

By Sarah Black



About 130 miles south of Dallas, Texas, lies the community of Gatesville, with a population just under 16,000 people. Like any small Texas town, big news stories are few and far between. But in the afternoon of June 26, Gatesville was rocked by an explosion at Coryell Memorial Hospital on the western side of town. The explosion killed two and injured 14, and left the town and its surrounding areas without a vital healthcare resource. Long-time NADCA member, Bob Allen, ASCS, CVI, of Allen & Company Environmental Service, played an important part in getting the hospital back up and running after the tragic event.

The Explosion

While the exact cause of the explosion is still under investigation — though it has been ruled an industrial accident — the blast came from a new construction site at the back of the hospital. The area closest to the explosion site suffered extreme damage, of course, but the entire 300,000-square-foot building and surrounding structures were affected. “The explosion site itself was a lot of structural damage, but walking through the rest of the site, you’d see light fixtures had fallen, ceiling tiles were blown out, just a lot of damage throughout all the areas,” said Joe Cockrum, project manager at Cavalry Construction and Restoration, the firm that handled the cleaning and restoration at the hospital. In areas where the ceiling was a fixed part of the structure, wood trusses were broken and sheet rock crumbled. Siding was blown off buildings and piping from near the blast site was blown about 400 feet away.

The explosion wasn’t the only problem, though. The blast created a concussion that raised the building’s ceiling up 6 inches and then dropped it back down, which generated and released an incredible amount of dust and debris throughout the entire hospital and surrounding buildings. Not only was the hospital dealing with the damage from the explosion itself, but



a massive cleaning effort would be required to get the hospital back in working order.

Building the Team

Before any serious work could begin, mechanical and structural engineers were brought in to evaluate the entire facility and issue a report on what needed to be addressed. However, to even evaluate the damage, crews had to clear out at least some of the debris. "Within 24 hours we had generators, 450 tons of temporary cooling and more than 100 workers on site," said Cockrum. "We were cleaning, boarding up windows and finding our specialized contractors." One of those specialized contractors was Bob Allen's company, brought in to evaluate the HVAC system and the ductwork, determine how much damage had been done and clean out the build-up that had shaken loose from the concussion.

Calling on specialized contractors for such a huge job can be a high-stakes situation for any project manager. Cockrum had met Allen at a refresher course for a certification required by

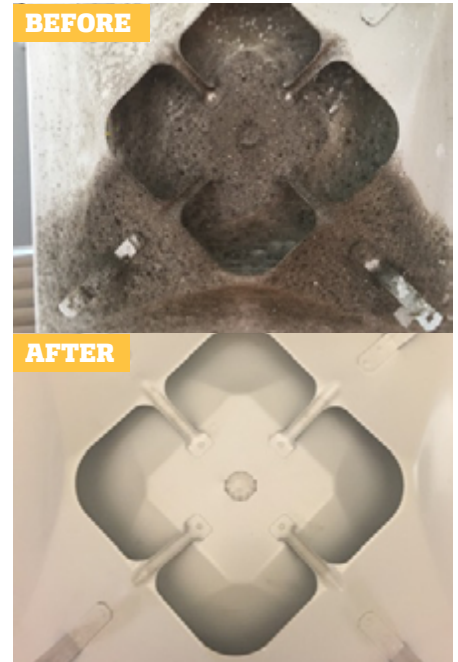


the State of Texas that they both hold. "Getting to know Bob, or anyone for that matter, you get a sense of how well they know their trade, and as you start to see results you can see that they're truly an expert in their space," said Cockrum, of how he vets specialized contractors. "Deciding to work with someone, knowing they will be a reflection of your own company, is a culmination of factors." In addition to demonstrating expertise, Cockrum cites professionalism, licensing and certifications as contributing factors.



The Clean-Up Begins

Hospital leadership wanted to focus on the hospital's most critical areas, first. "We started with the emergency room," said Don York, facility manager



at Coryell Memorial Hospital. "And certain areas, like the operating rooms, got special attention first because they can't function with any kind of contaminants in the system."

Allen's initial inspection showed that the dust and debris covering the inside of the hospital also filled the ductwork, in addition to the debris that had been released by the concussion. "When they showed us the pictures of what was in the ductwork and what it looked like after they had cleaned it, we determined that the entire facility and other buildings on the hospital's campus needed to be done," said York. "That included our wound care clinic across the road, dialysis center, our ambulatory service, the nursing home, everything."

A Unique Challenge

In addition to the challenges of completing a big job at a critical facility, Allen and his workers encountered an entirely new challenge. "Typically, we're working in a hospital after something like a

(continued on next page)

CLEANING AFTER A CRISIS (continued from previous page)

BLAST SITES



fire, so the building isn't occupied," said Allen. "In this instance, we were having to work around patients and in occupied areas."

The hospital's campus includes a nursing home and assisted living residences, and residents were eager to get back to their homes after the explosion, even while cleaning efforts were ongoing. "Because we had to get things back up and running quickly, and because we had to get residents back in their homes, Bob and his crew were working during the day with everyone here," said York. "Nothing was empty while they were doing the work." To protect patients and residents from airborne contaminants released during cleaning, areas were sealed off while the cleaning was completed.

One specialized tool Allen's company utilized on site was a 27-foot ultrasonic trailer. In addition to cleaning system components, Allen uses the trailer to clean vacuum heads, which ensures that the tools to do the job don't introduce new contaminants. Allen

ULTRASONIC TRAILER



WORKERS ON SITE



credits a serendipitous moment for his ultra-clean approach to jobs. "A lightbulb went off one day when I thought, 'does anyone look under the covers?' When we opened up the vacuum head, the fan had mold on it. So, we put it in the ultrasonic and cleaned it off. Now it's something we do for every big job," said Allen.

The trailer proved to be especially useful while working at the occupied hospital. "Anyone may go on site at a hospital and pressure wash in front of the building," said Allen. "But you want something that says you're a professional. Having ultrasonic cleaning capabilities enclosed in the trailer is another level of professionalism, especially when you're working around patients and residents." The trailer's steam capacity also allowed Allen's team to clean hospital equipment, like wheelchairs, on site.

Back to Work

Allen's team worked up to 14-hour shifts to get the work done at all the buildings on the hospital's campus. Engineers cleared the hospital to reopen after just a week, which was a relief not just for the community but for the more-than-500 people employed by the hospital. The blast site, located at the back of the hospital, collapsed and remains closed during the investigation into the cause of the explosion. ●