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Brian Saunders / Star-Free Press

**A Ventura County firefighter surveys the debris left after a gas explosion at a Camarillo packing plant**

# One man badly hurt by explosion

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An explosion ripped through a Camarillo produce packing plant Thursday evening, leaving one employee critically injured.

Cardboard boxes and wood were strewn across the dirt parking lot of Milton Poulos Inc., where a gas used to ripen produce is believed to have exploded, causing one-third of the 210-foot-long building to collapse.

Douglas Amao, 44, Oxnard, a packing supervisor, was in the tomato-packing room

when the explosion occurred, said Capt. Dan Spykerman, Ventura County Fire Department spokesman.

Fire officials believe Amao was changing cylinders of ethylene gas when the explosion occurred, Spykerman said.

Amao was taken to St. John's Regional Medical Center, where he was listed in critical condition this morning with multiple facial cuts, bruises and a fractured thigh bone.

Ethylene gas is non-toxic and odorless.

Spykerman said he estimated there were 15 employees present when the blast occurred

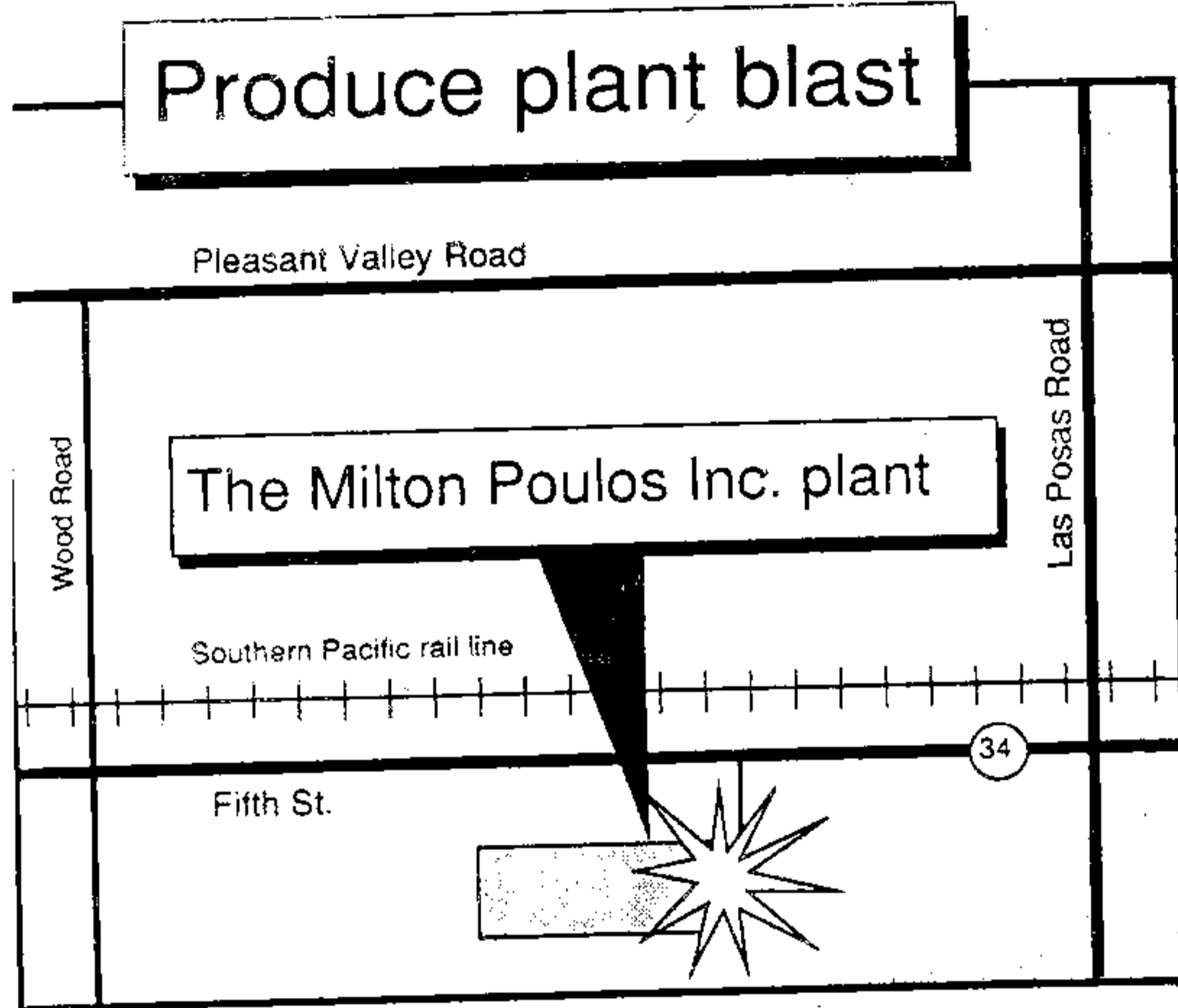
around 5:25 p.m.

There was no fire at the \$750,000-plant — located in a rural section of Camarillo — and damage was estimated at \$250,000.

An investigation into the cause of the explosion continued today after it was called off Thursday night because of darkness, said Bill Hager, fire department investigator.

Two county fire investigators, two members from the Sheriff's Department bomb squad, a representative from California Occupational Safety and Health Administration and a deputy district attorney will be part of the

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Andy Gomperz/Camarillo D

## Blast

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A hazardous materials team arrived at the packing house about an hour later to take samples of the ethylene. By 9 p.m., fire officials had temporarily halted their investigation into the cause of the explosion.

"Until we can get in there and take a look, we're really guessing at what it was" that touched off the blast, Spykerman said.

"What we have to do is go through the rubble to get to those cylinders ...," Firefighter Ruben Murriata, a member of the hazardous materials team, said late Thursday night.

That process was to begin early today.

The blast hurled scraps of wood, sheet metal and fiberglass hundreds of feet in all directions. Twisted pieces of aluminum siding were seen in a field some 300 feet from the tomato-ripening section of the building.

Windows of vehicles parked near the building were blown out by the explosion. Several trucks waiting for produce pickups also were damaged.

Truckers told fire officials they had to take cover under their rigs to avoid falling debris.

People as far as five miles away from the packing house reported hearing the explosion. Several likened it to a sonic boom.

"My God, my windows shook," said one caller to The Daily News who lives about two miles from Milton Poulos. "My whole house rattled."

Milton Poulos officials and employees at the scene refused to discuss the accident with members of the media.

When fire officials left, employees were allowed in parts of the building to prepare produce for transport.

The blast at the Milton Poulos Inc., produce packing plant debris as far away as 300 feet.