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Fire Erupts At Holcomb Power Plant

No employees were injured when fire erupted Wednesday morning at the Sunflower Electric Power Corp.'s coal-fueled power plant at Holcomb.

The fire in a coal crushing unit occurred after an explosion at the plant located 10 miles southwest of Garden City. A damage estimate wasn't available from Sunflower officials, but a preliminary examination indicated a smoldering belt on coal-moving equipment was the likely source.

A proposed expansion of the coal-fired plant has been the source of political controversy for years in Kansas. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius blocked the project for two years, but her replacement, Mark Parkinson, made a deal last year with Sunflower and state legislators to allow the expansion in exchange for adoption of "green" energy policies.

Emergency personnel from Garden City responded to the plant and had the fire contained by 2 a.m.

"We are thankful that everyone is safe and want to express our gratitude to the emergency crews who worked quickly and efficiently to control the fire," said Kyle Nelson, Sunflower's senior vice president and chief operating officer.

The 360-megawatt utility plant was offline for annual inspections, repairs and upgrades. The explosion occurred on the north coal belt in the crusher house where work was being done to reduce dust accumulation.

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