Massive explosion at Chinese chemical plant kills 64 and injures more than 600

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At least 64 people were killed and dozens were injured in a blast and fire Thursday afternoon at the Jiangsu Tianjiayi Chemical Co. pesticide production facility in Yencheng, China, international and local news organizations reported. Officials said strong shockwaves from the explosion registered as an earthquake.

Coverage by Chinese state-operated news organization Xinhua said that the explosion occurred at about 2:45 p.m. at the Chenjiagang Industrial Park, causing 47 fatalities and some 90 others with serious injuries. The force of the blast reportedly collapsed a number of buildings near the plant, trapping and injuring some workers. Over 900 firefighters took part in the effort to douse the blaze.

The blast took place in a production area of the facility and involved benzene, the South China Morning Post said in a report. Air quality monitoring teams have been dispatched to the site to determine if chemicals contaminated the surrounding area.

Those injured included a number of children who were attending a school near the pesticide plant when the incident occurred, according to a Financial Times article. The students were forced to evacuate the school. A magnitude 2.2 earthquake was recorded by the China Earthquake Administration near the plant site at the time of the explosion.

Chinese officials are investigating the cause of the accident.