

Quarry's escaping gas creates boom that rattles Vallejo

Rachel Raskin-Zrihen, Vallejo Times-Herald, 9-23-09

An air blast at Syar Industries on Tuesday caused a loud explosion that was heard and felt by people throughout Vallejo, and even in Benicia and Crockett.

It was an extremely rare phenomenon, company owner Jim Syar said. "We had a crack in the geology that allowed the gas to escape," he said. "In the 50 years we've been here, if it ever happened before, it was a long time ago."

Tuesday's noontime incident occurred at Syar's facility on Lake Herman Road in Vallejo. The private wholesale rock company also has locations in Napa and elsewhere, Syar said.

"I was just in the middle of the street and felt a rumble, and even the neighbors came running out of their houses," said Mark King of Benicia, 21. "I was surprised not to hear sirens afterward."

Mare Island resident Justin Ackermann, 41, said he was walking his dog when the ground seemed to move under his feet. "All of a sudden, it was just, 'BOOM!'" he said. "And it came up from the ground. The dog jumped with all four feet off the ground."

Ackermann said he called several friends, all of whom had felt the explosion.

"This was unlike anything I've experienced before, but this is Mare Island and weird things happen," he said. "A friend of mine said he thought maybe someone accidentally set off an old bomb with all the work they're doing on Azuar Drive."

Syar said his office received several calls asking for an explanation. "We got calls from the Vallejo Fire Department, from a city or county work crew and from several residents," he said.

Syar said his is an extremely precise occupation and everyone on the site is certified and well-trained, which is why this type of "anomaly" happens so rarely.

Still, he said he understands why people were concerned. "Whenever something changes in the environment, people want to know why, and they're entitled," he said. "We hope people weren't too upset over it. It wasn't something we planned to do, I'll tell you that."