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## Shaken residents go home

Some still waiting; Official marvels at small number of injuries

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The number of homes still off limits after a propane facility exploded over the weekend whittled down to about 50 yesterday, as officials grappled with the aftermath of a massive blast that closed businesses, damaged schools and left many residents with only their pyjamas on.

Thousands of employees, including production workers at the nearby Bombardier plant, had to miss work for all or part of the day as the cleanup around Keele Street and Wilson Avenue got underway. A series of explosions at the Sunrise Propane Industrial Gases plant before dawn on Sunday lit up the night sky and forced 12,000 people living inside a 1.6-kilometre radius to evacuate.

At a news conference yesterday afternoon, Mayor David Miller commended the actions of emergency workers who got people back home within 24 hours. Six people were taken to hospital, another 18 admitted themselves and paramedics treated about 40 people at the scene.

"One would think that from this type of incident you would have many more [injuries], so I see this as a very fortunate incident from that regard," said Bruce Farr, Toronto EMS chief.

One veteran firefighter, District Chief Bob Leek, died at the scene and the whereabouts of a Sunrise employee, identified by the company as Parvinder Saini, remain unknown. Police late last night reported a body had been found on the Sunrise property but had not been identified. A postmortem examination was to be scheduled, police said.

Fears about dangerous asbestos lingering in the air meant that about 100 homes closest to the epicentre remained off limits for much of the day.

Toronto police announced late yesterday afternoon that some of the residents living on the remaining blocked-off streets would be allowed to go home. It was of little comfort, however, to an older man who raised his arms in frustration and cried out for someone to help him when he learned that he was not on that list.

"It's not easy for us to have to tell people you have to stay away. People have left with, really, the clothes on their back," Constable Wendy Drummond told reporters and a crowd of concerned residents at the scene yesterday. "We've had people approach us being quite upset. But unfortunately we're in the job of public safety and we've done our bit."

Toronto police also said they were on the lookout for thieves after some looting was reported.

The area was flooded with uniformed and undercover officers to "send a clear message that we are there and what our expectations are," said Mark Pugash, a police spokesman.

No one ran off with vintage clothing at Value Village, on Wilson Avenue, but most of the store's glass windows were shattered in the blast.

"There were no injuries, luckily, because of the time of the explosion," said Tarek Salama, area manager. "There were a lot of the spectators taking pictures, but there were no incidents of direct looting."

Ada Puca, 62, celebrated the 23rd anniversary of her husband's death separated by police tape from the home he built on Spalding Avenue.

"I have nothing; we walking like this," she said, pointing to her slippers and sleepwear. "My house is there and we don't have nothing. We woke up at quarter to four in the morning, and we [thought] somebody put a bomb in the bottom of the house."

Ms. Puca, who lives with her daughter, said her car has also been broken into since the blast.

Plane-maker Bombardier Inc., whose Downview manufacturing site is a few hundred metres from the blast site, said it cancelled its midnight and morning production shifts yesterday but resumed assembly work in the afternoon. Damage to the facility is worst in its office and administration areas, and included broken windows, buckled doors and sporadic interruptions to the electric system, said company spokesman John Arnone.

No one at the facility was injured. A cost estimate for damages was not yet available and crews were still cleaning up the debris, Mr Arnone said.

"Our top priority is to ensure the safety of our employees," he said. Roughly 4,500 employees work at the Downsview site, which builds the Q400 turboprop plane, the Global Express business jet as well as wings for the Learjet aircraft.

The Toronto District School Board also had cleaning up to do after more than 100 windows and frames at Downsview Secondary School and another 30 at nearby Ancaster Public School were blown out.

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