



**Risk Mitigation Consulting Inc.**

*Intelligence and Analysis Division*

## OPEN SOURCE UPDATE

April 2019

### **INTENT**

This open source periodical is designed to provide an overview of relevant, publicly available information on threat and hazard events and analysis of potential impacts to the interests of the United States, both at home and abroad. This product is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all threat and hazard news and inclusion in this product does not constitute a confirmation of credibility nor precedence by RMC.



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## Threats

### Maryland Man Inspired by Islamic State Arrested – *Terrorism*

**Excerpt:** A Maryland man inspired by the Islamic State group plotted to ram a stolen U-Haul truck into as many pedestrians as possible at a popular convention and tourist destination just outside the nation’s capital, federal prosecutors said.

The allegation was made in a court filing as prosecutors in Maryland urged a judge to keep the defendant, 28-year-old Rondell Henry, detained on a charge of driving a stolen vehicle across state lines. The police arrested him on 28 March after officers who discovered the stolen truck saw him leap over a security fence.

Henry then made incriminating statements that show steps he took to maximize damage, prosecutors say.

**Analyst Comment:** Henry’s arrest underscores the ongoing concern related to homegrown violent extremists (HVEs), who often plan attacks using relatively low-skilled tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). The vehicle-ramming TTP has been used by other HVEs and “lone wolf” terrorists throughout the U.S. and worldwide, and has been suggested as a method of attack in various forms of propaganda released by the Islamic State terror group. High-profile examples of such attacks include the July 2016 attack in Nice, France in which 86 people were killed and over 400 were injured, as well as the October 2017 attack in New York City, which killed 8 people and injured 11 others. The perpetrators in both of these incidents were both believed to have been influenced by the Islamic State. However, it should be noted that the vehicle-ramming TTP has been utilized by other terrorists to include a neo-Nazi/white supremacist who attacked a crowd of counter-protesters at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. Vehicle-ramming attacks are often difficult-to-detect due to the lack of advanced operational planning necessary to conduct such attacks, while casualty numbers can be as high as various other forms of attacks (such as bombings or small arms attacks).

Source: <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/crime/bs-md-maryland-terror-plot-national-harbor-20190408-story.html>

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### CFIUS Orders Chinese Divestment of Dating App – *Foreign Intelligence Entities*

**Excerpt:** Chinese gaming company Beijing Kunlun Tech Co Ltd is seeking to sell Grindr LLC, the popular gay dating app it has owned since 2016, after a U.S. government national security panel raised concerns about its ownership, according to people familiar with the matter.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) has informed Kunlun that its ownership of West Hollywood, California-based Grindr constitutes a national security risk, the two sources said.



CFIUS' specific concerns and whether any attempt was made to mitigate them could not be learned. The United States has been increasingly scrutinizing app developers over the safety of personal data they handle, especially if some of it involves U.S. military or intelligence personnel.

**Analyst Comment:** Grindr describes itself as “the largest social networking app for gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people,” although one of the app’s primary functions is to serve as a matchmaking/dating platform. The app may also collect personal data such as an individual’s sexual orientation/preference, location (in order to facilitate localized matchmaking), and in some cases, even a person’s sexually-transmitted disease status.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United State (CFIUS) has decided to force Grindr’s Chinese parent company to divest from the app due to potential national security concerns. As with many other foreign-owned technology companies, concerns remain over the handling of personal data and the associated potential impacts to national security. For example, Grindr could be compelled (voluntarily or coercively) by Chinese state entities to hand over user data. If such personal information suggested that there was real or perceived potential for blackmail, Chinese intelligence operatives may seek to exploit it, particularly in cases involving individuals affiliated with the U.S. military, intelligence, government, or certain elements of the private sector.

Similarly, in early 2018, CFIUS blocked the acquisition of MoneyGram (a financial firm offering services to include the sending of funds, bill payment, and money orders) by a Chinese-owned firm. Although CFIUS does not typically elaborate on the specific reasons a deal is blocked, many observers noted that China’s government could observe individuals’ finances in order to identify potential targets for espionage.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-grindr-m-a-exclusive-idUSKCN1R809L>

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## Smart Home Devices and Domestic Abuse – *Cyber*

**Excerpt:** The people who called into the help hotlines and domestic violence shelters said they felt as if they were going crazy.

One woman had turned on her air-conditioner, but said it then switched off without her touching it. Another said the code numbers of the digital lock at her front door changed every day and she could not figure out why. Still another told an abuse help line that she kept hearing the doorbell ring, but no one was there.

Their stories are part of a new pattern of behavior in domestic abuse cases tied to the rise of smart home technology. Internet-connected locks, speakers, thermostats, lights and cameras that have been marketed as the newest conveniences are now also being used as a means for harassment, monitoring, revenge and control.

In more than 30 interviews with The New York Times, domestic abuse victims, their lawyers, shelter workers and emergency responders described how the technology was becoming an



alarming new tool. Abusers (using apps on their smartphones, which are connected to the internet-enabled devices) would remotely control everyday objects in the home, sometimes to watch and listen, other times to scare or show power. Even after a partner had left the home, the devices often stayed and continued to be used to intimidate and confuse.

**Analyst Comment:** The recent investigative report by the New York Times revealed the disturbing new trend of utilizing smart home/internet of things (IoT) devices for domestic abuse. These devices (which include smart locks and thermostats) are typically controlled via smartphone apps, which can allow abusers to harass their victims from a standoff distance. For example, an abuser could lock an individual out of their own home or could set a thermostat to an extremely hot or cold temperature to create discomfort. Additionally, cameras and other surveillance tools could be used to create an uneasy sense of monitoring and control.

However, while the New York Times' reporting examines smart devices in the context of domestic abuse, it is important to note that other malicious actors may seek to exploit the devices for a variety of purposes. Malicious cyber actors (to include cybercriminals or cyber-terrorists) could seek to take control of several devices at once (perhaps on a massive scale) in order to cause widespread fear and panic. Alternatively, criminals could exploit such devices in conjunction with more traditional criminal activities, such as burglary or kidnapping. Devices with built-in microphones, such as Google Home or Amazon Alexa, could potentially be hacked for the purposes of eavesdropping.

The security environment surrounding smart devices is still uncertain, as the devices rapidly proliferate into consumer markets. While it can be reasonable assumed that reputable manufacturers have implemented basic security measures into most products, the size and scale of the market for such products means that many products are likely to contain serious vulnerabilities. Still, even the most reputable manufacturers' products could likely be exploited by determined hackers, or could be abused with an individual with authorized permissions. Moreover, many of these devices are tied to a username and password, which, if compromised (through means such as phishing, hacking, or other data breaches), could allow an additional avenue for access.

Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/23/technology/smart-home-devices-domestic-abuse.html>

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## **LSD, Ecstasy Manufactured at NAVBASE Ventura County – Narcotics**

**Excerpt:** Two junior sailors stationed with a drone squadron have been convicted for manufacturing drugs on a California Navy base, according to legal records.

Aviation Electronics Technician Airman Morgan Elizabeth Henson, of Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19, was convicted at special court-martial in February.

Among the charges to which she pleaded guilty, Henson copped to manufacturing LSD and ecstasy on Naval Base Ventura County in October 2017, drugs she intended to distribute, according to charge sheets.



The Arizona native also pleaded guilty to LSD distribution at the same time and to possession of both drugs.

Henson also pleaded guilty to bringing the drugs on the Navy base in 2017 and to emptying pill capsules and filling them with ecstasy, according to court records.

**Analyst Comment:** Within the U.S. military, recent trends have indicated an increase in prescription drug abuse and a decrease in illicit drug use. In the latest available DoD health survey published in 2013, illicit drug use amongst active duty DoD members in 2011 was considered low, with only 1.4% reporting illicit or synthetic drug use within 12 months of the survey.

Drug abuse with the U.S. military poses a threat to both the health of the individual and the safety of the installation. In March 2019, a sailor assigned to the nuclear reactor department aboard the USS Ronald Reagan admitted to bringing LSD aboard the aircraft carrier. Ten other sailors from the same department previously faced administrative discipline in November 2018 for possessing and distributing LSD in connection to a purported drug ring aboard the nuclear aircraft carrier. Furthermore, in May 2018, 14 airmen assigned to force protection units at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming were disciplined for dropping acid between shifts.

Overall, Ventura County has been particularly impacted by the nation-wide opioid epidemic. From 2010-2015, 66 and 100 Ventura County residents died of opioid abuse each year, a rate much higher than the overall state rate. In December 2018, a man was arrested for selling ecstasy and LSD at a shopping center in Ventura County. Over \$300,000 worth of narcotics were found at his home.

*Source:* <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/04/two-drone-squadron-sailors-convicted-for-manufacturing-drugs-on-california-navy-base/>

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## Hazards

### Series of Earthquakes Strike Near Alabama-Florida State Line – *Geological Hazards*

**Excerpt:** Three more earthquakes struck near the Alabama/Florida state line on Thursday, bringing the region's total up to eight quakes in a little over a month.

The three minor earthquakes were recorded by the U.S. Geological Survey within hours of each other, according to the USGS website.

None of the quakes so far have been significant enough to do damage, though some who live in the area have reported feeling them.

**Analyst Comment:** Per the USGS, the Alabama-Florida state line is designated as a low-hazard seismic region, although small earthquakes do occur. A local geologist speculated that the earthquakes could have been caused by oil drilling in the area, although a fault system (the Pollard-Foshee fault system) is present in the region, north of the cities of Mobile and Pensacola. A number of DoD installations are present in the region (to include NAS Pensacola, Eglin AFB, and Tyndall AFB). While the reported earthquakes have been minor in nature, all of these installations (as well as others in the region) support aviation-related activities and could potentially be vulnerable to impacts such as runway damage.

Source: <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2019/04/12/three-more-earthquakes-strike-near-alabama-florida-line-thursday/3445713002/>

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### Offutt AFB Inundated by Floodwaters – *Meteorological Hazards*

**Excerpt:** Flooding from the Missouri River has shut down the runway and inundated 30 buildings at Offutt Air Force Base south of Omaha, Nebraska.

Offutt is home to U.S. Strategic Command, which oversees America's strategic nuclear forces, and the 55th Wing.

It's the second U.S. air base to suffer damage in a natural disaster in less than six months. Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida was forced to close for two months after Hurricane Michael devastated the base on 10 October 2018.

Offutt was restricted to “mission essential personnel” after about a third of the facility was cut off by rising floodwaters.

Thirty buildings have been inundated with as much as 8 feet of water, Tech. Sgt. Rachelle Blake, a 55th Wing spokeswoman, told the Omaha World-Herald. Another 30 buildings have been damaged. There are 200 buildings on the base.



**Analyst Comment:** In March 2019, heavy rain and melting snow resulted in widespread flooding throughout the Midwestern U.S., to include Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and South Dakota. In addition to the loss of life and property associated with the flooding, there were unique impacts to the U.S. military. Nebraska’s Offutt AFB was hit particularly hard by the flooding, resulting in serious mission impacts. The installation (which is home to the headquarters of U.S. Strategic Command) was forced to briefly close its runway; was temporarily restricted to “mission essential personnel”; and suffered extensive damage to structures located onboard the installation.

Other DoD installations have been seriously affected by severe weather in the past year, to include Tyndall AFB in Florida and Marine Corps installations in North Carolina. In October 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall as a Category 4 storm directly IVO Tyndall AFB, which had forced an evacuation of the installation, as well as the relocation of all airworthy F-22 fighter jets prior to the storm. When the storm made landfall, Air Force officials described the damage as “catastrophic,” with nearly every building on base suffering significant damage. Just one month prior, in September 2018, Hurricane Florence stalled over the eastern seaboard, resulting in widespread flooding in the Carolinas. Marine Corps officials have reported serious damage at Camp Lejeune, MCAS New River and MCAS Cherry Point as a result of the storm. Due to a variety of budgetary and political issues, the Marine Corps has not yet received adequate funds to conduct repairs at these installations, and have issued warnings regarding the potential impacts on readiness.

Source: <https://weather.com/news/news/2019-03-17-offutt-air-force-base-inundated-by-flood-waters>

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## Cyclone Devastates Southern Africa – *Meteorological Hazards*

**Excerpt:** Cyclone Idai may have killed more than 1,000 people and left 400,000 homeless near the port city of Beira in the southeastern African nation of Mozambique. It may be the worst weather-related disaster ever to hit the southern hemisphere, with 1.7 million people in the path of the cyclone in Mozambique and 920,000 affected in neighboring Malawi, U.N. officials told the BBC.

“The scale of suffering and loss is still not clear, and we expect that the number of people affected as well as the number of people who have lost their lives may rise,” said Jamie LeSueur of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in a statement.

Idai made landfall on 15 March with winds up to 100 miles an hour and a storm surge topping 20 feet. Heavy rains accompanied the storm and have continued with six more inches forecast for today, 19 March, and not expected to end until 21 March, according to the Mozambique National Meteorology Institute forecast.

Flooding is widespread throughout central Mozambique, with roads and bridges washed out, said Gregory Carr, president of the Gorongosa National Park, an area roughly the size of Rhode Island that is located 100 miles inland from Beira.





**Analyst Comment:** Most tropical cyclone activity in the southwest Indian Ocean occurs between October and May, with activity peaking in mid-January and again in mid-February to early March. Idai is the seventh intense tropical cyclone of the basin's 2018-2019 season. Mozambique averages about 1.5 tropical cyclones a year. Those reported are rarely more powerful than Category 2. Strong cyclones such as Idai make landfall in Mozambique only about once every 10 years, meaning the country is poorly prepared to deal with their severe effects.

The effects of Cyclone Idai were unusually devastating for a number of reasons. The cyclone's path was an unusual loop shape. It formed 4 March just off the coast of the Mozambique Channel, between Mozambique and the island of Madagascar. Idai came ashore as a weak tropical storm in northern Mozambique and then went back out into the channel before doing a U-turn off the western coast of Madagascar 11 March. After turning around, it continued to gain strength and made landfall at the city of Beira on 15 March.

Beira is Mozambique's fourth-largest city, home to around 500,000 people, and a port that sits on the mouth of the River Pungwe. As the city is partially below sea-level, it is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather and flooding. Cyclone Idai caused flooding, knocked down buildings, and engulfed roads. A large dam also burst, cutting off the last road into the city. According to the International Red Cross, the storm destroyed "90 percent" of Beira. Floods of up to 19ft deep have devastated large areas of Mozambique. The flood zone is estimated to have covered 1,200 sq. miles. Over a million vaccination doses have been sent to Mozambique as over 100 cases of cholera have been reported in cyclone survivors.

After the storm passed central Mozambique, it hit eastern Zimbabwe. Dozens of people have been reported killed and at least 200,000 affected. Roads and bridges have collapsed, and homes have been destroyed. In districts close to Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique, at least half the population has been affected, according to preliminary UN assessments.

Although Malawi was not struck directly, the cyclone caused unusually heavy rainfall in the area. The UN reports more than 80,000 people have been displaced in Malawi.

Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/03/why-mozambique-cyclone-idai-was-so-destructive/>

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## Record Rate of Measles Cases in the U.S. – *Biological Hazards*

**Excerpt:** According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been 387 cases in 15 states through 28 March. That compares to 372 cases in all of last year. It is the highest number of reported cases since 2014, when there were 667, and the second-highest number of reported cases since measles was declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000. If current trends continue, 2019 could end up as the worst year since 2000.

This year's growing numbers have been driven by outbreaks in a handful of states, including New York, California, and Washington. Rockland County, a suburb north of New York City, declared a state of emergency and imposed a 30-day ban on unvaccinated children in public spaces after



157 confirmed cases of measles in the community. The outbreak apparently began when several people who were exposed overseas came back and infected others who hadn't had the vaccine.

**Analyst Comment:** Measles is a highly contagious disease and can cause pneumonia, encephalitis (swelling of the brain) and death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says two doses of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine are about 97% effective in preventing the disease. Measles was declared “eradicated” in the United States in 2000, after only 86 cases were confirmed. However, in the following years measles cases began to increase. Between 2001 and 2018, 2014 reported the highest annual total, 667 cases, at a rate of 1.83 cases per day. From January to March of 2019, 287 cases have been reported, a record rate of 4.84 cases per day.

Past surges of measles cases in the United States have generally been caused by an increase in the number of travelers who get measles abroad and bring it into the U.S., and/or further spread of measles in U.S. communities with pockets of unvaccinated people. In 2018, 82 people brought measles to the U.S. from other countries. The World Health Organization has deemed “vaccine hesitancy” one of the top global threats of 2019.

In other parts of the globe, measles outbreaks have also been caused by limited access to vaccinations and foreign visitors.

*Source:* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/measles-outbreak-2019-exceed-2018-numbers-anti-vaccination/>

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## **Navy Barge Capsizes at Secretive Idaho Testing Facility – *Accidental Events***

**Excerpt:** A barge used to support testing of Navy submarine stealth technology capsized earlier this year in Idaho, officials confirmed.

The experimental support platform is used by the Naval Surface Warfare Center’s Acoustic Research Detachment at Lake Pend Oreille as part of a mission to develop and test submarine models and the technology that helps make boats silent and sneaky.

The damage sustained to the barge on Feb. 11 was categorized as a “Class A” mishap, which entails total destruction or more than \$2 million in damage, according to the Naval Safety Center.

Investigators continue to probe what caused the vessel to capsize but officials suspect it might have been triggered by an excessive amount of ice accumulating on the barge, according to Roxie Thomsen Merritt, a spokeswoman for the warfare center’s Carderock Division.

**Analyst Comment:** Although a formal investigation into the incident is still ongoing, open source media reporting indicates that the barge sank following a severe weather system, in which large amounts of snow and ice accumulated on the barge. As noted in the NavyTimes article, the incident was classified as a “Class A” mishap in excess of \$2 million in damage, and Navy decision-makers have not yet determined whether to salvage the vessel or construct a new one. The high price tag



is likely due to the barge's specialized mission to support submarine-related testing. The incident highlights the potential impact of severe weather (in this case snow/ice accumulation) on DoD assets and infrastructure.

Source: <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/05/investigators-probe-why-barge-capsized-at-secret-base/>

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## Japanese F-35 Goes Missing Over the Pacific Ocean – *Accidental Events*

**Excerpt:** Japan has started combing the seafloor of the Pacific Ocean for the wreckage of its F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter, two days after the aircraft crashed into waters off northern Japan.

Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya, addressing the media, said the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force has deployed a submarine rescue vessel to search the depths in the area where the F-35A crashed. The area is estimated to be about 5,000 feet (1,500 meters) deep.

The pilot of the crashed F-35, who the Japan Air Self-Defense Force identified as 41-year-old Maj. Akinori Hosomi, is still missing. He was taking part in an air combat training mission with three other F-35s when the pilot and aircraft lost contact with other members of the flight and disappeared from radar approximately 85 miles (135 kilometers) east of Misawa Air Base in the northern part of Japan's main island of Honshu.

The Misawa-based aircraft disappeared soon after Hosomi — who had 3,200 flight hours under his belt that included 60 on the F-35A — told the other pilots taking part to end the training portion of the flight. No other communication was subsequently heard from him, and none of the other pilots saw the aircraft crash.

The disappearance of the aircraft triggered a large search operation by ships and aircraft belonging to the Japanese self-defense forces. According to the U.S. Navy's Japan-based 7th Fleet, the destroyer Stethem and several P-8A Poseidon multimission aircraft also took part in the search. Some wreckage from the F-35 was subsequently sighted in the water, which confirmed the fate of the missing jet.

**Analyst Comment:** The F-35 stealth jet that crashed into the Pacific Ocean is one of the most expensive weapons systems ever made. Japan was intended to adopt the F-35 as the mainstay of its air force. The so-called "fifth generation" fighter plane costs about \$100 million, and Japan plans to buy about 150 more of them from the U.S. This crash is the second-ever involving an F-35. An F-35B belonging to the U.S. Marine Corps had crashed in South Carolina in September 2018, the cause of which is still under investigation.

This crashed aircraft had been the first of 13 Japanese F-35As assembled so far by Mitsubishi's final assembly and check out facility in Nagoya. The plane that crashed had been active for less than a year. The 12 other JASDF (Japan Air Self-Defense Force) F-35As have been ordered temporarily grounded, and the 14th aircraft assembled, which is still at Nagoya and undergoing



pre-delivery flight tests, has also been grounded. So far there has been no reported intention to revise Japan's procurement of more F-35s.

Currently there are no indications that anyone other than Japan and the U.S. are trying to recover the crashed F-35. However, should a foreign government, such as Russia's or China's, beat Japanese or U.S. search crews to the missing plane's wreckage, there is a possible intelligence windfall. The western Pacific Ocean is currently home to a variety of international disputes. Tensions with Russia have been heating up over a territorial dispute over islands north of Hokkaido. The Soviet Union seized the islands after the end of World War II. Japan lodged a protest with Russia after the Kremlin announced live-fire drills on the islands known as the Northern Territories in Japan and the Southern Kurils in Russia. Meanwhile, Japan and China are also engaged in a separate dispute over islands in the East China Sea. The U.S. "forward deployed" forces in the western Pacific operate in a crowded region, where chance encounters and competition with other major powers is a constant condition.

Source: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2019/04/12/f-35a-crash-japans-defense-minister-addresses-security-concerns-procurement-plans/>

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## Deer Park Terminal Chemical Fire – *Accidental Events*

**Excerpt:** The fire began in a single tank on Sunday afternoon and spread to a second tank, Intercontinental Terminals Company (ITC) said.

By Monday morning, seven of the facility's 242 tanks were involved in the fire, and the blaze spread to an eighth tank before 5:30 a.m., the company said.

Later, however, ITC spokeswoman Alice Richardson said only six tanks were affected and that one of the tanks originally cited was empty and another was falsely reported on fire.

Authorities reopened Highway 225 early Monday and lifted an order that residents of Deer Park stay inside with their windows closed and central cooling or heating units turned off.

Firefighters are using foam and water to douse the blaze, Richardson said. They hope that once the fire is contained, they can close the tank valves and the fire will put itself out.

**Analyst Comment:** The Deer Park terminal has the capacity to store over half a billion gallons of various petrochemical liquids and gases, as well as fuel oil, bunker oil and distillates. Preliminary investigation indicates a fire started in a transfer line to a tank containing a colorless, flammable gas called isobutylene. The blaze then spread to a storage building. Some of the storage tanks that caught fire have also contained naphtha and xylene, components in the production of petroleum. One tank also contained toluene, an additive to gasoline, nail polish remover, glue and paint thinner. Other tanks in the terminal contain gas blend stocks and oil used for machine lubrication.



Since the initial incident, 11 storage tanks at Deer Park have caught fire, burning for over 6 days. The fire reignited in several locations over that period of time. Additionally, a wall surrounding the tank farm breached, increasing the risk that airborne and liquid toxins would be released and forcing a portion of the Ship Channel to close. The breach on the north side of the facility's perimeter allowed chemicals and detritus from the blaze to flow into nearby waterways.

Swallowing or breathing xylene can cause death, while nonlethal exposure can cause eye, nose, throat and skin irritation. Naphtha can be an eye and nasal irritant. County officials have reported that ongoing air monitoring shows no health risks to the area around the plant.

*Source:* <https://wtkr.com/2019/03/19/schools-to-reopen-as-texas-chemical-plant-fire-continues-to-burn/>

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