

LAFD

Firefighter Dies in Line of Duty

Firefighter Brent Lovrien, a 10-year veteran, dies after an explosion in Westchester. Engineer Anthony Guzman is injured.

Scene photo by Angel Gomez, Member Services Manager

On March 26, an explosion in a underground electrical vault killed LAFD Firefighter Brent Lovrien, a 10-year veteran, on duty at FS 95 in the LAX area. The explosion also injured Engineer Anthony Guzman, an 18-year veteran.

At 1:57 p.m., firefighters were summoned to investigate a "smell of smoke" inside an office supply store at 8540 S. Sepulveda Blvd. in the Westchester area of Los Angeles, not far from LAX.

LAFD Engine 5 arrived at 2:03 p.m. and reported an underground electrical vault explosion in front of the location, and that they would handle the situation.

At 2:16 p.m., Engine 5 reported a second underground electrical vault explosion and requested additional Fire Department resources for the new incident at 8800 S. Sepulveda Blvd.

At 2:23 p.m., LAFD dispatchers received a telephone call reporting a structure fire at the site of the second explosion.

Engine 5, already on scene, initially reported no evidence of fire. One minute later, they reported fire in a locked room, and to keep all resources responding.

Engine 95 arrived soon thereafter to investigate the source of the smoke in the locked room, an approximately seven-foot wide by four-foot-deep electrical/storage closet on the southeast, first floor corner of the two-story structure.

The crew of Engine 95 sought to access the locked room, which contained electric utility meters for the building, when a severe explosion occurred, causing injury to two firefighters and one civilian.

Firefighter Brent A. Lovrien, age 35, a 10-year veteran of the LAFD assigned to the "A" Platoon at Fire Station 95 since October 2005, died shortly after arrival at the Centinela Freeman Regional Medical Center, Marina Campus.

Engineer Anthony J. Guzman, age 48, an 18-year veteran of the LAFD assigned to the "A" Platoon at Fire Station 95 since February 2002, suffered multiple fractures and facial trauma. He was taken to the UCLA Medical Center in Westwood in serious but stable condition. Following surgery and post-operative care, Engineer Guzman was released from the hospital March 30.

The civilian was assessed at the scene and released.

As dictated by Fire Department policy, a formal and detailed multi-agency investigation

sought to determine the exact nature of the explosion, as well as the precise cause and manner of Firefighter Lovrien's death.

The following is a statement by Battalion Chief John Miller, Commanding Officer of the LAFD Arson/Counter-Terrorism Section:

"Based on our investigation, which included physical examination, numerous interviews, and the collection of physical evidence, has determined that the explosion at 8800 S. Sepulveda was the result of a fire that originated in the electrical vault located at the intersection of Sepulveda and La Tijera.

"Various witnesses reported smelling odors as early as 10 a.m. It is our opinion that the fire was a result of a ground fault in an electrical conduit that was feed out of the underground vault. This ground fault resulted in a fire within the vault, which pressurized the vault with unburned products of combustion. This material, traveled through the conduit transmission corridors, approximately 250 feet that caused the initial explosion at the underground electrical vault located in front of Staples. Witnesses report the access cover of the vault traveling upwards of 20 feet in the air.

"The resulting pressure from this explosion causes smoke to travel back down the corridors to the electrical vault at Sepulveda and La Tijera. During this time, smoke is traveling in all directions and follows the underground electrical conduit to the electrical room at 8800 Sepulveda. This combustible smoke accumulated in the confined area of the electrical room. When Firefighter Lovrien attempted entry into the room, a spark was generated when the composite blade of the rotary saw struck the locking mechanism of the door.

"There was no evidence of any fire, electrical problem, natural gas leak or incendiary devices found in the room. Investigators have concluded that unburned combustible gases, from a fire in the electrical vault located in the street at the front of the building, accumulated in the electrical room. These products of combustion reached its explosive limit and was ignited by a spark from the forcible entry attempts."

The men and women of the Los Angeles Fire Department remain deeply appreciative of the kindness and support of so many, and for the patience of Westchester residents and LAX travelers inconvenienced by our response and investigation.

The Club sends its condolences to the family and friends of Firefighter Lovrien on this tremendous loss.



Firefighter Brent Lovrien.



Engineer Anthony Guzman.



An LAFD helicopter leaves the scene of the blast that killed Firefighter Brent Lovrien.



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