

# Amtec denies responsibility for fatal accident at Redstone Arsenal

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

- February 28, 2011

Redstone Arsenal commander Major General Jim Rogers issued a statement on Friday, saying that the Army has determined the cause of the May 2010 [fatal accident](#) at the Arsenal that caused the death of two contract workers employed by Amtec Corp. According to a team of experts in weapons research, science and engineering drawn from the Army, NASA and academia, the cause of the explosion was worker safety violations by Amtec.

According to Rogers, the experts reviewed thousands of pieces of evidence from the explosion, conducted detailed interviews with witnesses, and performed a number of experiments and simulations before coming to their conclusion.

The cause of the explosion and the wrongful deaths of the two workers, according to the report, was that Amtec had workers operate a decanter centrifuge to process the potentially explosive materials in person. Instead, it should have run the tests remotely. The chemicals in the centrifuge were highly explosive, and friction from the rotating parts generated enough heat to cause the chemicals to explode, "ultimately producing an intense fireball that engulfed personnel present in the building."

## **Amtec also contesting OSHA workplace safety citations and fines**

In November, OSHA also concluded that Amtec had committed safety violations directly related to the explosion. It issued two "willful" and two "serious" workplace safety citations and proposed fining Amtec \$134,000. Amtec has appealed the citations.

The workplace safety citations were issued because OSHA determined that, despite knowing the risks, Amtec "failed to ensure the proper equipment was being used, while also allowing the workers to process the material in excess of 10 times the amount of explosives according to the Army's standard operating procedures."

Amtec has appealed the OSHA citations, and attorney Rod Steakley, who represents Huntsville-based Amtec, said Friday that "Amtec will aggressively defend and oppose all adverse OSHA findings."

Steakley also said Friday that Amtec the Army's report is "materially inaccurate" and "misleading" in a number of ways, although the company has not yet had time to fully review the findings.

"Undoubtedly, something went horribly wrong on the day of the incident," Steakley said, reminding reporters that the men who died in the explosion were Amtec employees. "Amtec is committed to getting to the bottom of this."

### **Report also finds inadequate verification of worker safety compliance by Army**

The investigation also determined that there had been "inadequate verification of Amtec's compliance with safety and technical requirements by responsible Army personnel."

Organizations within the Army are taking steps to improve verification of contractor compliance with [worker safety](#) rules, Rogers said in his statement.

"In memory of Jim and Jerry, their families and for all of Team Redstone, I promise that we will do everything we can to improve our overall safety," Rogers told reporters. "We will take steps to ensure that accidents like this one, that took the lives of two great Americans, will never happen again."

**Source:** The Huntsville Times, "[Amtec attorney: Army statement about investigation of deadly Redstone Arsenal explosion paints 'inaccurate picture'](#)," Kenneth Kesner, February 25, 2011