

Brandenburg's Safety-First Approach Pays Off at Tornado-Damaged Pfizer Site

Thorough preparation and complex site safety training paid off for employees of Brandenburg and its client Pfizer in advance of an EF3 tornado that ripped through Pfizer's 250-acre pharmaceutical manufacturing complex in Rocky Mount, N.C., on July 19, 2023.

Advance safety training resulted in zero deaths and injuries for Brandenburg, Pfizer and other contractors throughout the storm and afterwards during dismantling and demolition work at the site. As practiced, crews took shelter in a designated safety area when the tornado ravaged the facility. Two essential Pfizer warehouse buildings—one 86,000 sq ft and the other 50,000 sq ft in size—were destroyed or left in unsafe condition.

The Rocky Mount site is one of the world's largest sterile injectable facilities, with more than 1.4 million sq ft of manufacturing space. Pfizer confirmed that larger warehouse was the most affected by the tornado that damaged 40,000 pallets of packaging supplies and finished goods stored there. This damage occurred at a critical time when national drug shortages were at a 10-year high. Hospitals were already on high alert because the low-cost generic drug products manufactured at the site were among the most shortage-prone on the market. Pfizer needed to get the facilities back online and functioning as quickly as possible.

Prior to the storm, Brandenburg, in coordination with architectural, engineering and consulting firm Ramboll Group, had begun dismantling and demolition work at the Rocky Mount Pfizer facilities. The team was praised for its commitment to safety as a core behavior and for its exceptional speed and skill in the demolition process. Pfizer valued these behaviors and the practice of taking shelter as preparation, and it all played a part in the decision to engage Brandenburg for immediate response to the tornado damage.

Following the storm, before crews were permitted to start demolition and dismantling operations related to the



The Brandenburg team was praised for its commitment to safety and for its exceptional speed and skill in the demolition process of the tornado-damaged Pfizer site in Rocky Mount, N.C.

tornado damage, Brandenburg worked with Ramboll while conducting an engineering survey, capping utilities and developing a site-specific Health and Safety Plan (HASP). Brandenburg developed comprehensive method statements, job safety analyses and Safety Task Analysis cards for all on-site team members. The goal was to determine the condition of framing, floors and walls and to prepare for the possibility of an unplanned collapse of any portion of the warehouse structures during the deconstruction. This safety-first initiative was mandatory to protect every employee from potential harm.

The next priority was to identify, color code and isolate all utilities, a major concern for the safety of the demolition team. All piping, electrical and communication circuitry was disconnected and physically air gapped. The utility removal process was necessarily surgical and methodical to accommodate the conditions in and around the structurally compromised building structures.

The HASP was curated to specifically address the unique needs for secure passage in and around the torn and twisted tornado-induced rubble. It was designed according to Pfizer's site requirements as well as local, state and national regulatory compliance mandates. The HASP covers administrative requirements; safety, exposure control and chemical hazards; as well as an emergency action plan.

Brandenburg also completed Pfizer's

Rocky Mount Method Statement form to communicate environmental, health and safety requirements, address project/work task-specific concerns and assume appropriate activity coordination before performing work. It laid out a set of instructions, provided a detailed guide for the work to be done and included a work plan for completing the job safely. Brandenburg prides itself in creating method statements that consider every angle and assure that safety protocols are enacted on every task and project.

One of Brandenburg's unique safety challenges was the need to work around both damaged and destroyed boxes of pharmaceutical products. There was a genuine concern about the potential for opioid exposure as opioids were an ingredient in multiple products destroyed by the tornado. To proactively mitigate potential employee harm, Brandenburg worked in unison with its occupational health provider to analyze potential scenarios. The company also maintained a supply of Narcan on-site and trained each employee in its use and application.

The high-risk task of clearing the damage from the tornado, as well as the complicated selective removal of equipment, accentuated the challenges of the project. However, both were completed on time, on budget and with no reported health and safety incidents. The Brandenburg team worked more than 63,000 employee hours with zero recordable injuries and no impact to the environment. ♦