

Equipment operator caught in Fresno gas pipe explosion still in critical condition



Pacific Gas & Electric Co. released this photo of the area where the natural gas line was ruptured.

PACIFIC GAS & ELECTRIC CO.

The man driving a front-end loader when a gas pipeline exploded remained in critical condition Thursday, nearly two weeks after a fire and explosion at the Fresno County law enforcement gun range.

A statement from the man's family identified him as Ismael Arreazola. On April 17, he was doing earth-moving work for Fresno County's public works department when the gas line ruptured, enveloping Arreazola in a tower of flame.

Arreazola suffered burns on at least 40% of his body, according to his family. He is being treated at Community Regional Medical Center.

An investigation has yet to determine the cause of the explosion.

Thirteen people were injured by the blast and fire, including two sheriff's deputies.

On Thursday, six people remained hospitalized at Community Regional's burn unit. Along with Arreazola, the other five are inmates from Fresno County Jail who were doing maintenance at the gun range. An update from the sheriff's office on Thursday mistakenly said all five inmates are now in stable condition. Sheriff's spokesman Tony Botti later said two remain in critical, but stable condition.

The blast prompted authorities to close northbound Highway 99 for several hours.

