

29 dead as explosion rocks Mexico's fireworks market

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Mexico City: At least 29 people were killed and over 70 injured after an explosion ripped through a fireworks market on the northern outskirts of Mexico city.

Mexico's federal police said in an earlier tweet at least nine people died in the explosion. Dozens were reported injured.

The explosion sent a huge plume of charcoal-gray smoke billowing into the sky.

Images broadcast by Milenio TV showed smoke rising from the scorched ground and fireworks stands. Emergency crews were attending to victims and hosing down hotspots.

The blast at the open-air San Pablito fireworks market in Tultepec, about 20 miles (32 km) north of Mexico City, also injured at least 70 others, according to a tweet from federal police. A local emergency services worker told Reuters that at least 27 people had died.

Pyrotechnics are a major industry in Tultepec, which is about 40 kilometers (about 25 miles) north of Mexico City.

Isidro Sanchez, the head of Tultepec emergency services, said the death toll was preliminary as rescue workers scoured the site.

National Civil Protection coordinator Luis Felipe Puente told Milenio TV that some nearby homes were also damaged. The scene remained dangerous and he asked people not to come within 3 miles (5km) to avoid danger or hampering the emergency response. Puente added that there was no choice but to let any unexploded fireworks burn off.

In 2005, a fire engulfed the same market, touching off a chain of explosions that levelled hundreds of stalls just ahead of Mexico's Independence Day. A similar fire at the San Pablito Market also destroyed hundreds of stands in September 2006.

Many in Mexico traditionally celebrate holidays – including Christmas and New Year – by setting off noisy firecrackers and rockets.

- AP inputs