

# Pemex Refinery Explosion Followed Safety Lapse, Official Says

By **Amy Stillman** and **Adam Williams**

June 16, 2017, 11:35 PM GMT+2

- 
- Civil Protection says Pemex failed to follow safety protocols
  - Pemex says fire was caused by spill of crude after rains
- 

A flood that triggered a fatal fire at Pemex's Salina Cruz refinery this week might have been avoided if the company had followed safety procedures recommended by a regional government disaster-response agency, according to an official with that agency.

The refinery flooded at least in part because Pemex had not cleared nearby rivers of trash and debris so the water could flow more freely away from the plant, said Cesar Adrian Garcia, coordinator of the Salina Cruz Civil Protection Agency, in an interview. Pemex was warned about the problem in May in the agency's contingency plan for the rainy season, but the company did not heed the warning, Garcia said. The government-run group is charged with responding to local emergencies and overseeing risk management policies.

Pemex rejected what it called baseless speculation. "A serious and deep investigation is being carried out to determine the causes" of the fire, Pemex said in an email from a spokesman who can't be named due to company policy.

"Pemex has the most strict protocols of security given the inherent risk of our

industry."

The fire at the Salina Cruz refinery, where Pemex has been seeking investment partners to improve operations, began early Wednesday morning after heavy rains from Tropical Storm Calvin flooded the facility on Tuesday. The fire burned two days, killing a Pemex firefighter who had responded to the blaze. Pemex said the fire was extinguished early Friday.

Pemex says heavy rains caused holding tanks at the refinery to overflow, contaminating flood water with hydrocarbons that caused an explosion when they were ignited. It is still investigating the exact cause of the fire.

Pemex has had chronic problems with its six refineries, where losses have grown to about 100 billion pesos (\$5.5 billion) due to maintenance problems and unplanned shutdowns. Salina Cruz, which has the capacity to process 330,000 daily crude barrels, will resume operations once the area is deemed safe, Pemex said in a statement Friday.

