

Two Explosions Blast at Boston Marathon Finish Line

Two explosions struck the Boston Marathon as runners crossed the finish line on Monday, witnesses said, injuring at least four people on a day when tens of thousands of people pack the streets to watch one of the world's best-known marathons.

Pictures from the scene showed blood stains on the ground and several people knocked down. Massachusetts General Hospital was treating four victims of the explosion in its emergency room but information about their condition was not immediately available, a spokeswoman said.

Police reported at least one explosion and witnesses said there were two, which hit as spectators were cheering on people finishing the Boston Marathon, which was first run in 1897.

Reporters in the media center heard two blasts.

"There was an explosion. Police, fire and EMS (emergency medical services) are on the scene, we have no indication of how many people are injured," a spokeswoman for the Boston Police Department said.

Mike Mitchell of Vancouver, Canada, a runner who had finished the race, said he was looking back at the finish line and saw a "massive explosion."

Smoke rose 50 feet (15 meters) in the air, Mitchell said. People began running and screaming after hearing the noise, Mitchell said.

"Everybody freaked out," Mitchell said.

Television images showed ambulances, fire trucks and dozens of police vehicles near the finish line.

Hundreds of thousands of spectators typically line the 26.2 mile (km) race course, with the heaviest crowds near the finish line. The blasts occurred more than five hours after the start of the race, at a time when most top athletes were off the course but slower amateur marathoners were still running.

The transit agency shut down all service to the area, citing police activity.

Ambulances arrived on the scene within minutes and runners and spectators could be seen crying and consoling each other.

The Boston Marathon has been held on Patriots Day, the third Monday of April, since 1897. The event, which starts in Hopkinton, Mass., and ends in Boston's Copley Square, attracts an estimated half-million spectators and some 20,000 participants every year.

Earlier on Monday, Ethiopia's Lelisa Desisa and Kenya's Rita Jeptoo won the men's and women's events, continuing African runners' dominance in the sport.

This story is developing. Stay tuned to Charisma News for updates.