Blast at Dutch COVID test center appears intentional

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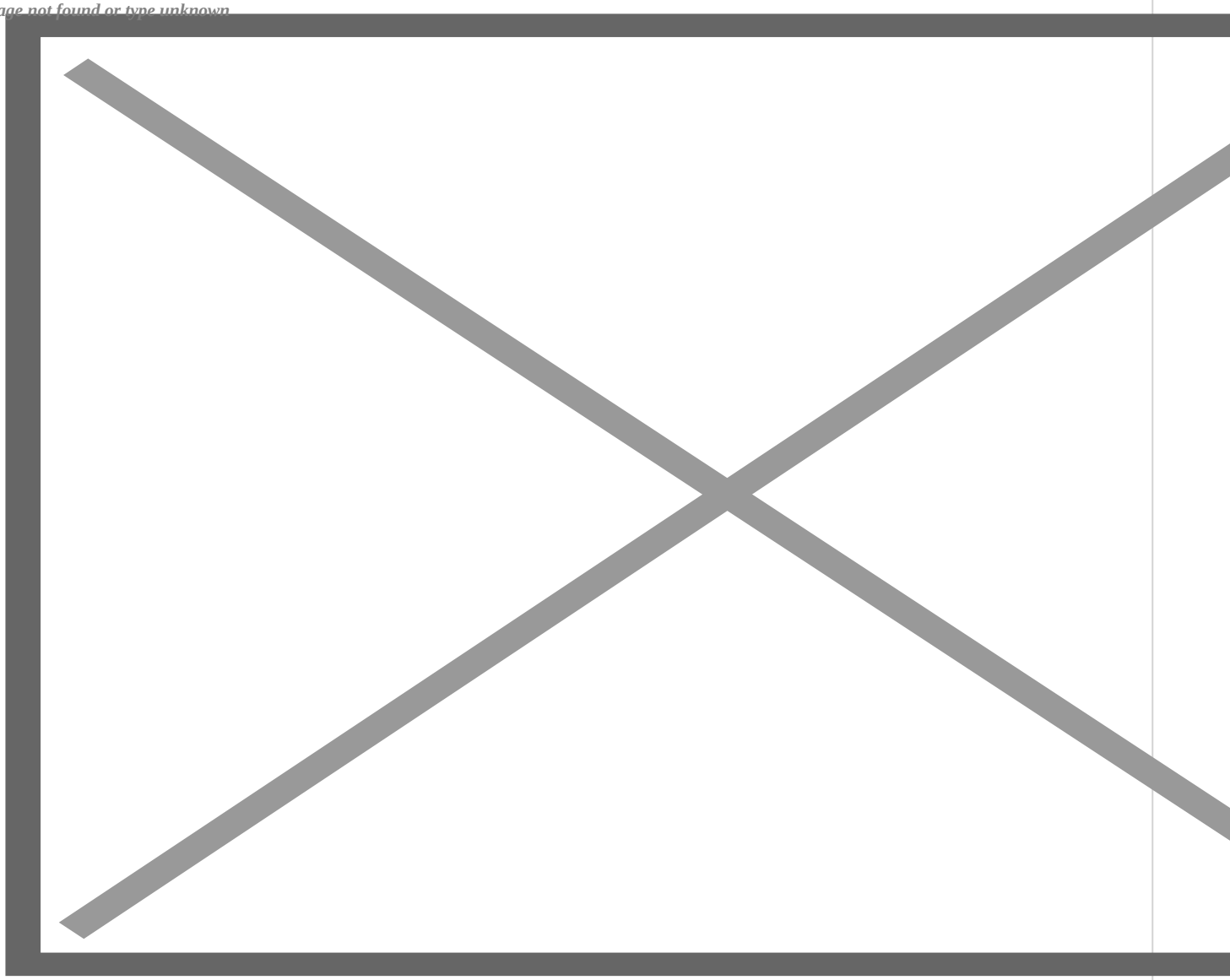

Police officers have cordoned off the area as they carry out investigations into the blast. (Photo: Eva Plevier/Reuters)

?Amsterdam, March 3 (RHC)-- A coronavirus testing center in the Netherlands was intentionally targeted, Dutch police said, after an explosion at the site. The blast on Wednesday in Bovenkarspel, a northern town, shattered windows but caused no injuries, police from the province of North Holland said in a statement.

The metal remains of the explosive were found in front of the building; the device “must have been placed” there, police spokesman Menno Hartenberg told Reuters news agency. “Something like that doesn’t just happen by accident, it has to be laid,” he said, adding the device was about 10 cm by 10 cm (four inches by four inches).

There was one security guard inside the building when the explosion took place, but that person was unharmed.

Health Minister Hugo de Jonge described the incident as an “insane” act. “For more than a year we have been leaning on these people on the front lines and now this,” he tweeted.

Officers cordoned off the area as they carried out investigations. Wednesday morning test appointments in Bovenkarspel were cancelled, according to public broadcaster NOS.

The region around Bovenkarspel is currently suffering one of the Netherlands’ worst COVID-19 outbreaks, with 181 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with around 27 per 100,000 nationally.

At least one hospital has been forced to send patients to other provinces because intensive care units are overwhelmed. “In this area, the infections are going up, there is a real serious outbreak and the hospitals here are struggling,” Al Jazeera’s Vaessen said. “And also generally in the Netherlands infections are on the rise.”

The blast follows the worst unrest the Netherlands has witnessed in decades, with many angered by strict restrictions aimed at containing the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this year, the government introduced a night-time curfew, the first to be implemented in the Netherlands since World War II.

The measure went into effect on January 23 and led to several days of rioting. The protests gripped several cities and saw rioters torch a COVID testing centre in Urk, a northern village.

Police clamped down and hundreds of rioters were arrested. Many have already been sentenced by Dutch courts. Security has been stepped up at some coronavirus test locations because of threats and vandalism.

Some measures were eased on Wednesday, with hairdressers reopening and non-essential shops allowed to accept a small number of visitors by appointment. More than 15,700 people have died of coronavirus in the Netherlands, which has recorded more than 1.1 million cases.

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