

Geyser of fuel erupts

A 60-foot-tall geyser of gasoline on its way to fuel jets at Kennedy and LaGuardia airports shot up into the air yesterday morning in Willowbrook when a digging machine accidentally cut into an underground pipeline.

The 30 mile-long pipeline runs from Linden, N.J., along the Staten Island Expressway, to the two airports in Queens.

The 9:15 a.m. mishap occurred on South Gannon Avenue, the service road off the Staten Island Expressway near the highway's Victory Boulevard exit, while workmen tried to repair a faulty valve on the pipeline.

Officials said as many as 35,000 gallons of high-octane gasoline escaped from the ruptured pipe and into storm sewers during the five hours it took to pinpoint and halt the leak.

After the leak was stopped, the escaped fuel flowed down Victory Boulevard into soil surrounding Willowbrook Park. Some of the oily liquid later surfaced into a creek at the William T. Davis wildlife preserve in Travis — about four miles away.

Firefighters at the accident scene used thousands of gallons of foam and a vacuum to stop the gas from spreading any further.