

Leak

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quest of Fire Department officials. Con Edison cut off power to street lights in the area.

Sample vapor levels taken near sewer openings along the blocked off section of Victory Boulevard were still at "near explosive levels" at 10:30 p.m., Lehan said.

The fuel flowed down Victory Boulevard into soil surrounding Willowbrook Park and also through storm sewer lines before it emptied into a creek at the William T. Davis Wildlife Preserve in Travis.

Firefighters at the preserve used foam and a vacuum to control the fuel runoff.

Firefighters washed down 50 condominiums under construction opposite the geyser as a preventive measure before the spraying leak was finally pinpointed and plugged at 12:15 p.m.

By 1:30 p.m., the incident was declared "under control" by the Fire Department.

"The incident was not reported immediately because the three-man crew from the pipeline company wanted to be sure they could get the leak under control first," said one firefighter on the scene. "But the situation continued to worsen."

Fire Commissioner Joseph Spinnato said the entire pipeline was shut down shortly after 9:30 a.m., as well as valves a mile apart on each side of the affected area of the line, in an effort to contain the leak.

He said as many as 35,000 gallons of the fuel may have leaked into the storm sewers near the pipeline, but that nearby sanitary sewers and water lines were not affected.

Deputy Fire Commissioner John Mulligan said the geyser continued to spew between 40 and 50 gallons of fuel per minute into the air and onto the roadway while firefighters used two hoses to spray about 7,000 gallons of a fish protein-based foam mixed with water to neutralize the gas.

Officer Michael Zarrilli of Sta-

ten Island Highway Patrol first noticed the plight of the workers and the shooting stream of high octane gasoline shortly after 9 a.m. when he stopped a city bus for a traffic violation near the expressway's Victory Boulevard exit.

"The bus was in the left lane when I pulled it and the driver over. I made him drive down under the overpass on Victory Boulevard — that's when I saw the gasoline shooting out from the pipeline and into the air on South Gannon," he recalled. "I immediately radioed 911."

Joseph Colangelo of New Springville, a passerby, said he saw the pipeline workers "soaking wet" and "running around" in all directions.

"They were wet, dirty and their clothing was just soaked. This happened around 7:30 a.m. At first I thought a water main was broken. Next I smelled gas, but I attributed it to a gas leak coming from my car. I was on my way to work, but then something told me to stick around," he said. "Then suddenly all I saw was ambulances, police and fire trucks."

Mulligan said 200 firefighters from 35 Fire Department units, 100 policemen and six Emergency Medical Service ambulances were on the scene before the leak was finally plugged.

At 9:30 a.m. yesterday, 65 children between the ages of 3 and 5 at the Alphabetland Pre-School Center at 2734 Victory Blvd. were evacuated because of "choking fumes" outside the building, police said.

Within 15 minutes after the school was evacuated, residents of 30 homes on Darcey Avenue — some multi-family dwellings located in back of the condominiums under construction — were also told to leave as a safety measure by police and firefighters. Some stayed with friends and relatives, police said.

Gladys Schweiger, a Red Cross spokeswoman, said plans had been made with Sea View Hospi-

tal and Home to provide 500 beds and a similar number at a nearby elementary school "should the need have arisen" to evacuate the Staten Island Developmental Center.

Fire officials said "high levels" of gasoline vapors had been detected in concrete vaults holding underground wires at the Staten Island Developmental Center, making the contemplation of such an action "necessary" until about 4 p.m., when the storm sewers were flushed of gasoline residue and the vaults rechecked by Con Edison.

City environmental officials said chemical tests conducted by their agency indicated the gasoline had been confined to the storm sewers while "high readings" of gasoline vapor had been found in concrete vaults containing underground electrical wires beneath the developmental center and on Victory Boulevard, which runs parallel to South Gannon Avenue.

A container truck obtained by the DEP was used to pump out residual gas in the pipeline after the dual line was shut down, Mulligan said.

Throughout the night, workers pumped water into storm sewers near the damaged pipe and used equipment to suck up the water and fuel mixture. A parade of tanker trucks, under contract to Buckeye, carried 5,500-gallon loads of water and gasoline to a hazardous waste disposal facility, said Mira Ledman, an assistant commissioner of the DEP.

Ledman would not reveal the identity or the location of the disposal facility last night.

She was one of the officials working from an inter-agency "field headquarters" vehicle, parked at Canterbury Avenue and Victory Boulevard, along with crews from the police, fire, sanitation and transportation departments and the Coast Guard.

Ledman said a DEP crew will be on the scene this morning to remove mounds of soil and debris

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