

Residents felt evacuation was inconvenience

By JIM HUGHES
Advance Staff Writer

Ursula Cashin went shopping for a few groceries yesterday morning, but when she returned to her Darcey Avenue home at about 10 a.m., she was greeted by a bevy of firemen who told her to go away.

"I had to get into my house," she said. "I went in and threw a few dairy products into the fridge. All my other groceries are on the table. It's frightening. We have to evacuate, and they told us to take anything with us that we may need."

Mrs. Cashin was one of about 40 people who were ordered to leave their homes on Darcey Avenue in Willowbrook yesterday morning after a ruptured pipeline sent 35,000 gallons of gas into the air a few hundred feet from their homes.

In addition to the residents, the 50 children attending the Alphabetland Pre School Center on Victory Boulevard were evacuated and whisked away in a city bus to the Holiday Inn on Richmond Avenue in Graniteville.

Although they were not given any official word, most of the residents had returned to their homes by 8 p.m. Fire officials said the schoolchildren would be able to return to classes today.

Most residents in the 30 homes that face the pipeline seemed to view the evacuation orders as more of an inconvenience than a serious problem. Some of the residents said they didn't think much of the odors, which began wafting into their homes at about 9:45 a.m..

"I didn't think it was anything 'cause we get odors from Jersey all the time," said one resident who declined to identify himself.

Brian Cutick, 18, who missed his classes at the College of Staten Island because he did not want to leave his house unattended, said he turned off the pilot lights on his stove when he

first smelled the gas odors. When the smell got stronger, he called Brooklyn Union Gas.

Some residents were plainly frightened by the smell. Irene Moss said she was asleep when the gas smell entered her home.

"I was sleeping and something told me to get up," she said. "I smelled something and it wasn't the type of smell that says go back to sleep. I got up and realized firemen had come."

Over at the Holiday Inn, 50 children between the ages of 2 and 5 happily bounced about one of the hotel's conference rooms.

Joan Magliolo, a teacher at the school, said teachers first smelled the odors at about 9:15 a.m. They called police, who told them to remain in the building. Later, the police walked the children out of the building and hailed an empty city bus, which brought them to the hotel.

"We thought the place was going to explode," said Amy Madonna, a teacher's aide. "We told the children we were going to a party. They were frightened, but they were good."

Ms. Magliolo said the teachers had to send back for lunch boxes and diapers, but said otherwise things were under control. Emergency Medical Service workers came and asked if any of the children felt sick, but none did, Ms. Magliolo said.

The teachers tried to keep the children entertained with games as well as demonstrations by ambulance workers who remained in the room as a precaution.

"We could really use a television," said Josie Chapparelli, another teacher.

Sasha DeHart, 5, said she wasn't frightened leaving the school. But John McKenna, 2, ran around the hotel room in circles, yelling, "I want my mommy." His mother arrived to pick him up several hours later, as did many other parents.



S.I, Advance Photo by Steve Zaffarano

Children evacuated from Alphabetland Pre-School sit in the Holiday Inn playing a game about spiders.

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