

Workers toil into the night to clean leak site

By GLENN CHAPMAN
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Long after the threat of catastrophe had dissipated, and displaced Willowbrook residents were back safely in their homes, emergency workers from nearly a half-dozen city agencies still toiled to rid the area of the last vestiges of the volatile vapor spewed by the broken pipeline.

Officials from the Police, Fire, Traffic and Sanitation departments, along with the Coast Guard and the Department of Environmental Protection scrambled in and out of the field

headquarters set up in an "inter-agency command vehicle" at Canterbury Avenue and Victory Boulevard.

High powered search lights mounted on emergency vehicles turned night into day at the accident sight on Victory Boulevard and South Gannon Avenue, as grime-splattered men swept down the wet roadway, trapping polluted water in sand corrals that allowed vacuum hoses to draw it into waiting tank trucks.

Scores of five-gallon plastic drums, emptied of their foam fire retardant, were strewn along the

roadside near hoses still delivering rivers of water into the sewer system. The smell of gasoline still permeated the air as workers manned heavy-duty construction vehicles, plowing and moving mounds of sand and earth, and dredging the sewer catch basins to prevent the contaminated water from accumulating.

Arriving on the scene within a half hour of the accident, and helping to bolster the morale of the emergency force, were representatives of the Red Cross. A meal van set up near the field headquarters by the relief agency

served 300 sandwiches, an equal number of servings of beef stew and rice, and "lots of coffee" to emergency personnel through the day, according to Robert Chittum, a Red Cross services assistant.

"We keep them going," said Bob Busch, another services assistant working in the van. "We'll be feeding them through the night."

According to Sal Tomasulo, Red Cross assistant supervisor, a "trailer full of cots and supplies" was on the scene in case it became necessary to evacuate a

large number of families.

A little over a mile away, 42nd Battalion Chief Ted Goldfarb watched as employees of the Buckeye Pipeline Co., of Linden, N.J., waded hip-deep in a pool of gasoline and water in the William T. Davis Wildlife Preserve in Travis. Using a skimmer-type vacuum, workers were busy "scavenging" the gasoline from the surface of a pool of liquid, trapped as it exited the sewer system.

"None of the gas has gotten past the dam," said Goldfarb, a Willowbrook resident. "But we could be here all night cleaning it

up."

Supervisors and workers from all of the agencies braced themselves for an arduous night of labor. Sanitation workers moved in with truck loads of sand, ready to coat the road in an effort to soak up the oily slick.

Charles Abner, a hazardous material specialist with the DEP voiced the evening's theme as he hopped into his truck on Signs Road.

"At best, it's going to be a long night," Abner said with a sullen smile as he drove off to check the progress at the accident sight.