

# Pipeline passes test; pumping to resume

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Fire officials last night permitted a pipeline company to resume pumping gasoline through a line that ruptured Monday and spewed 35,000 gallons of explosive fuel around Victory Boulevard in Willowbrook.

After officials from the Buckeye Pipe Line Co. sent a high-pressure stream of water through a two-mile stretch of the pipe yesterday, fire officials said they were satisfied the line was leak-free.

During the test, police closed a number of streets in the vicinity, creating a traffic jam on Richmond Avenue and leading some area residents to think another emergency had occurred.

Roy Haase, a spokesman for Buckeye, said the Linden, N.J.-based company expected to resume sending gas through the 12-inch pipeline sometime this morning.

The pipeline, which transports gasoline for such major oil companies as Exxon and Getty, runs underground from Linden, N.J. through Staten Island and on to Kennedy International and LaGuardia airports in Queens. Much of the gas winds up in storage tanks in Long Island City, where it is sold to service stations throughout the city, according to Haase.

On Monday morning, a contractor hired by Buckeye struck a valve gauge on the line, sending a 60-foot geyser of gas into the air. More than 90 people had to be evacuated from nearby homes and buildings, and more than 200 firefighters scrambled about for

hours coating the fuel with a fire-retardant foam.

Police were forced to cordon off a three-quarter-mile stretch of Victory Boulevard from Willowbrook Road to Richmond Avenue. Officials used vacuum pumps through the night Monday before they were sure most of the errant gas had been recovered.

By late last night, fire officials were satisfied that the damaged gasoline valve had been replaced, and that the pipe had no other leaks. To prove it, Buckeye officials released water from Linden that rushed through the pipe at 2,000 pounds per square inch over a period of four hours, ending about midnight.

Haase said the streets were closed off for 45 minutes during the beginning of the test because fire officials feared that the road would be torn up if the pipe ruptured.

"I'm sure we have a lot of irate commuters, but we have to think of safety first," he said.

The sight of fire vehicles and blocked streets during the test caught residents by surprise and left some thinking that the danger of an explosion had returned.

"We didn't know anything about it," said Carol Pasquale, who lives on Sommer Avenue. "We thought there was another emergency. My girls were coming home from shopping and they panicked."

Edward LaRocca of Paulding Avenue said his daughter and her children fled his home in fear. He said residents should have been informed of the test either through a public address system or a radio broadcast.

"They threw this whole community into a panic," he said. "Nobody knew what was going on."

Buckeye officials monitored a two-mile stretch of the pipe near the leak as the water passed through to Long Island City. Haase said the water went through the pipe at a pressure about four times as great as the gas normally does.

Jim Hansen, an assistant chemical engineer with the Fire Department's Division of Fire Protection, monitored Buckeye's tests on Graham Avenue in Bulls Head before giving his approval to fire dispatchers late last night.

Fire officials said yesterday that they are still investigating the incident.

Although the pipeline was considered repaired, some residents on Darcey Avenue in Willowbrook said yesterday they are fearful living near the line. Most of the residents had to abandon their homes Monday morning when the gas started gushing.

"It makes us think we're going to die," said one man who did not want to be identified. "How can the city make it safer? Can we believe in the future that we won't have more trouble like this?"

Another man, who also did not want his name used, said he has lived on Darcey for 15 years but had no idea the pipeline was only several hundred feet from his home.

"We're living on a time bomb," he said, "I think if my kids still lived here I'd move. I'm not happy living on a time bomb. I saw enough of that in the war."



Workers clean up contaminated dirt in the vicinity of the pipeline which ruptured Monday.

When Haase was asked what Buckeye could do to reassure residents in the area, he said, "No one can guarantee accidents won't happen," he said. "With anything that is built by man this can happen."

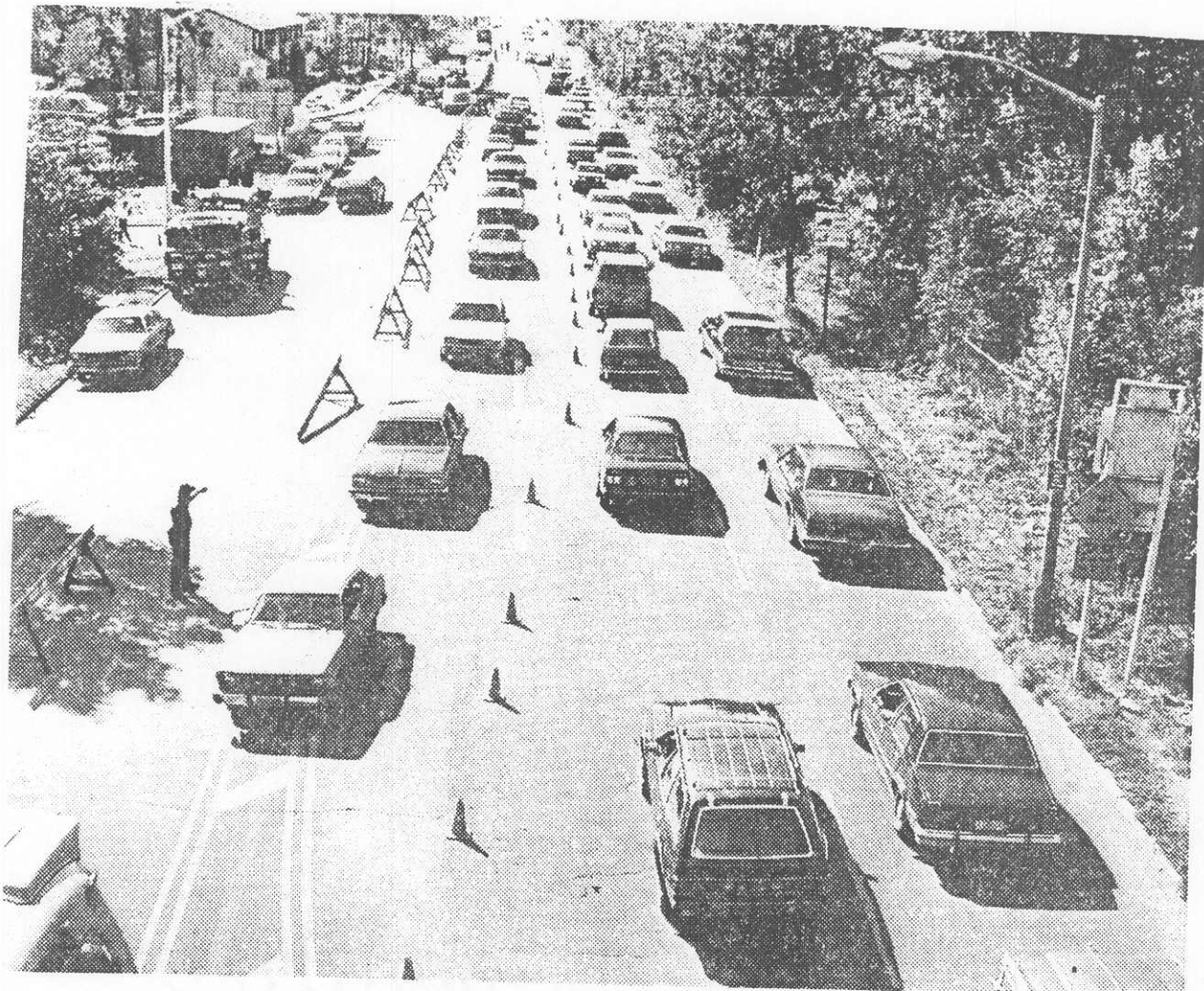
The spokesman, however, noted that the 20-year-old line does not run under homes on Darcey. He said the line travels under Victory Boulevard in Willowbrook, then passes by South Gannon Avenue and under the Staten Island Expressway all the way into Brooklyn.

To further allay fears, Haase said Buckeye has hired the New England Pollution Control company to conduct soil tests today to make sure no other gasoline is trapped in the area along Victory Boulevard.

As of yesterday, Buckeye and city Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) employees were still uncovering small pockets of fuel as they dug up stretches of soil on a sidewalk along South Gannon Avenue. Ted Navasi, a DEP-hazardous materials specialist, said the digging might continue for several more days.

Navasi said he did not think workers would have to dig up the soil near a new, unoccupied development of 110-condominium units.

Many of those units were caught in a crossfire of foam and gas Monday. Robert Lombardi, a carpenter with Avon Green, the company that built the units, said two of the buildings in the development would require new shingles because they had been sprayed with gas. He predicted



S.I. Advance Photos by Frank J. Johns

Police direct traffic along a barricaded section of Victory Boulevard, Willowbrook.

the repairs would cost at least \$10,000.

Lombardi said gas may have also lodged on the cedar-wood exterior of the two buildings, but said he did not think the damage would push back the unit's scheduled opening date. The studio and one-bedroom condominium units are scheduled to open in November or December, Lombardi said.

The two condominium developers, Lloyd Fetner and Morton Meltzer, inspected the units Tuesday, Lombardi said. They were unavailable for comment yesterday.

While the Victory Boulevard cleanup continued yesterday, officials from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) visited the leak site for the second straight day. Michael Carnavo, the agency's acting area director, said OSHA wanted to make sure employees working near the site were being adequately protected.

"We generally found procedures were being followed," he said. "On any incident of that type we send a compliance officer."

Meanwhile, Haase explained Buckeye's version of the events preceding the leak. He said United Utility Pipeline (UUP), a company that lists a Bloomfield office, had been contracted to do excavating work on the four-foot deep pipe.

Buckeye wanted to make some repairs on one of the pipe's large valves, Haase said. But in digging to reach the large valve, a UUP worker operating a backhoe apparently struck and dislodged a smaller valve that is used to gauge the pipe's pressure, he said.

The company has replaced the small valve, but has not made any of the planned repairs on the larger valve, Haase said.

Although Buckeye is conducting its own investigation, Haase noted that a Buckeye supervisor was at the site when the valve was struck, and said the company is assuming full responsibility for the incident.

He said the company is paying for the entire cleanup operation and the foam used by the Fire Department. Haase said Buckeye will pay for police and fire overtime if it is requested to do so.

Police officials said yesterday they anticipated leaving the site by today. Officials also predicted that Victory Boulevard would be entirely reopened today. The street was reopened late Tuesday but traffic was funneled into one lane in each direction.