

Gas spill causes "serious" problem

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POINT PLEASANT BEACH — Rainwater spilled out of a pit where an old gasoline tank was, causing emergency crews to divert contaminated water from a lake and drain sewer pipes.

Police and fire officials arrived at the former site of Surf Chevrolet, 1506 Route 35 South around 8 a.m. Saturday, Point Pleasant Beach Fire Department Chief Joseph Michigan said.

A smell of gasoline fumes was emanating from an 8-by-8-foot pit in the back of the property where the remnants of an old gasoline tank was being removed, he said. Rain had collected and the pit was overflowing with contaminated water.

Members of the fire department created a man-made dike, using dirt and pillows, to prevent any more of the water from entering storm drains.

Firefighters were also sent to the Lake of the Lilies to see if any of the contaminant emptied from the catch basins into the lake, he said. They also removed manhole covers to let any hazardous vapors vent.

The Berkeley Township Emergency Response Team helped with determining which storm drains and pipes were being threatened. They also brought inflatable barriers to help block off the flow of water.

There were approximately 40 to 50 people working at the scene, in various stages, from the start at 8 a.m. to about midnight, Michigan said.

The call originally came in as a "typical gas leak," and turned out to be a much more serious situation, he said.

Hydroscience Inc. in Toms River had been performing the work, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection staff arrived to oversee Hydroscience workers in their removal of the remaining gasoline from the tank, and later the water from the sewer system, said Kyle Grace, police officer and assistant chief of the fire department.

There were no injuries reported.

Local authorities referred all questions regarding the extent of contamination to the DEP, but a DEP representative could not be reached at press time. Employees from Surf Chevrolet and Hydroscience Inc. were also unavailable.