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Dillenbeck Drive sewer pump station after July 1 gasoline explosion.

Altamont Enterprise — Fred B. Abele

McKownville: News And Comment

By FRED B. ABELE

In the early morning hours of Sunday, July 1, residents of the Ayre Drive-Dillenbeck Drive area heard the noise of an explosion about 4 a.m. No one thought to report the incident and it was not until some time later that a town employee checking the installation found that the Town of Guilderland sewage pumping station off Dillenbeck Drive had been all but demolished by an explosion which disabled the pump facilities and caused damages estimated in the neighborhood of $200,000.

The explosion was caused by leaking gasoline from a pipe to tank connection at the Getty station on Western Ave. The gasoline found its way into the sewer system which runs by gravity to the Dillenbeck Drive pumping station. Here it is collected and pumped up to the Albany county system at Washington Ave. A large quantity of the gas had collected in the pump pit. The pump motor started — there was a spark — boom!

This much of the incident was covered by the news media. However, as in most such incidents, there is much more to the story. Town officials, realizing the potential for other explosions from fumes from leaking gasoline trapped in the mains or backing up into businesses or homes, alerted the volunteer fire departments of the town. Within a short period all companies had responded, providing exhaust fans, portable generators to operate them and other special equipment, assembled at the McKownville Fire House.

The exhaust fans were soon in place, deployed so as to exhaust the gasoline fumes from all the manholes in the vicinity of Western Ave., Arcadia Ave. and Hillcrest Ave., near the site of the spill. In addition one pumper was stationed at the Getty station with a hydrant hookup to cope with eventualities as the gas was pumped from the errant tank into a waiting tank truck.

Some 40 or more volunteer firemen from the McKownville, North Bethlehem, Westmere, Guilderland, Guilderland Center, Fort Hunter, and Altamont departments spent at least four hours of their Sunday in the operation (some 200 man hours volunteered) to avert disaster.

At the McKownville Fire House, the ladies of the McKownville Fire Department auxiliary prepared and served food, coffee and soda for those engaged in the operation. Water department personnel worked all day to get the pumps at the station back to automatic operation as electrical controls had been badly damaged or destroyed.

The entire operation is another example of the ability of the volunteer fire service of our Town of Guilderland to work together as a unit when the occasion arises.