

Underground Blast KO's Area Phone Service

By Craig McGuire

More than 7,000 Midwood residents found themselves without phone service last week following an underground explosion.

John Bonomo, spokesman for NYNEX, formerly New York Telephone, said the explosion, which occurred at 10 p.m. last Wednesday night on Avenue P and East 22nd Street, paralyzed telephone service in a 20-block radius.

Fire Department spokesman Frank McCabe said the explosion was caused by melted ice which leaked and corroded wire insulation.

Eight underground cables were destroyed, either in the blast or in the ensuing fire.

Many of the lines initially thought to have been destroyed were salvaged.

"The water used to extinguish the fire damaged many of the lines," said Bonomo. "After they dried out, several of the lines were saved."

The seven copper cables and one fiber optic cable that were destroyed controlled the service for 7,000 to 9,000 NYNEX customers.

Originally, Bonomo anticipated full restoration would take more than a week, but as of early Monday, workmen were closing in on completion.

"Our biggest constraint is the tedious process of splicing the more than 7,000 lines onto the new cable," said Bonomo.

Workmen have labored around the clock since the explosion to repair the lines.

Anticipating the cold

snap, Bonomo had said, "Repair time will slow as the temperature drops down near zero."

A makeshift wooden shelter was constructed over the site. "While the cold is a problem, the ability to pump heat down into the repair site allowed us to make good progress," the spokesman related.

While repairmen struggled through temperatures dipping down to single digits, NYNEX mobilized temporary services to allay the effects of the downed lines.

Two banks of public telephones were set up, one on Quentin Road and Marine Parkway, and the other on Avenue O and East 22nd Street.

A NYNEX community relations van, mounted with a loudspeaker announcing



A makeshift wooden structure shelters NYNEX workmen as they labor to repair over 7,000 lines either damaged or destroyed by an underground explosion in Midwood last Wednesday night.

Photo by Craig McGuire

information, roamed the area. NYNEX representatives circulated throughout the area on foot distributing information and availing residents with cellular phones.

Residents were not the only ones affected by the explosion.

In the heart of the affected area, Community Hospital, at Kings Highway and East 23rd Street, temporarily lost phone service.

Hospital spokesperson Chris Abate said hospital services were not affected.

"We lost service for awhile, but NYNEX gave us priority," said Abate. "We had emergency service almost immediately."

Abate confirmed that full service was restored to the hospital Friday afternoon.

"Unfortunately, these things happen," said Abate. "It's just a good thing that the telephone company reacted as quickly as they did."

Area schools also found themselves without service

for a time. NYNEX provided Public School 197, 1599 East 22nd Street, Hudde Andries Junior High School 240, 2500 Nostrand Avenue, and James Madison High School, 3787 Bedford Avenue, with cellular phones until service was restored.

Bonomo said, "As far as I know, our service seems to be the only one affected by the explosion."

According to Con Edison, electrical power in the area was not affected by the blast.