

Hazardous Materials

# Pool Gas Cloud Stumps Investigators

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Investigators are still stumped about a mystery cloud of gas that sent seven young girls to the hospital from Harvey West Pool on Thursday.

"It looks like it's not directly connected to the pool, but we can't determine the source or what it was," Lowell Rau, senior sanitarian for the county Environmental Health Department, said Friday afternoon. "We've looked at every lead and possibility at this point, and we don't have any idea."

Santa Cruz firefighters were summoned to the pool shortly before 2 p.m. Thursday when the girls suddenly became nauseated and had difficulty breathing.

Some of the girls told firemen they smelled "something bad" in the pool. Most were coughing and having trouble breathing deeply.

They were taken to Community and Dominican hospitals, where all were treated and released.

Another 100 or so swimmers at the pool were unaffected,

"We feel pretty strongly it was

something airborne," Deputy Fire Chief Bill Schuette said Saturday, "but it's still a mystery to us."

City, county and PG&E crews searched the neighborhood Thursday and Friday, looking in vain for the cause.

Pool equipment, chlorine cylinders and natural gas lines were checked for leaks, the water was tested for bacteriological contamination and all the industries in the area were queried about chemical use and possible spills.

The possibility of chemicals mixing

in the sewer lines and resultant gases rising through drains was also investigated. Again the findings were negative.

The pool was open for use Saturday.

"We feel it's safe," said Schuette, "but we'd feel a lot better if we found a source and solved the puzzle."

The county's supervising sanitarian, Ken Mabie, said, "We're kind of stumped at this point. We hope that if an employee or citizen saw anything suspicious, they would let us know, even anonymously."