

Corralitos chemical spill forces 300 residents to evacuate area

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CORRALITOS — Three hundred residents were evacuated here Monday night after 14 barrels of chemicals, some of them leaking, were found alongside Browns Valley Road.

Sheriff's Deputy Michael Borkin spotted the barrels near the bridge over Corralitos Creek at about 8 p.m. Borkin and 10 others, including six Department of Forestry firefighters and volunteers, were sent to Watsonville Community Hospital, where they were observed and released with no ill effects.

Crews from the IT Corp. of Martinez were on the scene this morning, loading the barrels into containment vessels so they could be trucked away for disposal.

Experts still had not been able to confirm the contents of all of the 14 barrels. As of late this morning the chemicals in

six, 35-gallon drums still had not been identified.

The others included five 55-gallon barrels of isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol, one 55-gallon barrel of butyl alcohol, one 55-gallon barrel of sulphuric acid and one 55-gallon barrel bearing the trade name of Triton.

Several barrels, including the sulfuric acid, were leaking, according to Capt. Kenneth Thomas of the Department of Forestry's Corralitos station.

One barrel, believed to contain the butyl alcohol, went into Corralitos Creek, Thomas said.

Investigators this morning could not determine what kind of company might have been using the chemicals or who dumped the barrels alongside the road. "It's a real mixed bag of chemicals," said Highway Patrolman Craig Fox. The CHP and Sheriff's Office are conducting an in-

vestigation to try to trace the chemicals.

After chemists verify the contents of the barrels, the Highway Patrol will attempt to identify from where the chemicals were shipped. "Ultimately we hope to find out who dumped them," said Fox.

Because firefighters, wearing special hazardous-materials suits and breathing apparatus, could not identify all of the substances as being non-toxic, they began evacuating area residents at about 9 p.m. Some 300 persons left their homes to stay with friends, relatives or to stay at shelters set up at the Casserly Community Hall, Grace Baptist Church and at the Salsipuedes Fire Department.

The evacuation was precautionary, said Capt. Pat desimone of the La Selva Beach Fire Department. "This is normal procedure when a possible hazardous spill occurs and the substance cannot be easily identified as a non-toxic agent," said desimone. All south county fire departments sent units to the scene.

A second evaluation of the barrels by firefighters at 1 a.m. showed the spill to be remaining stable and residents were allowed to return to their homes at about 2 o'clock this morning.

The county Board of Supervisors this morning directed the county administrative office to look for a toxic spill response team closer to home after Supervisor Robley Levy complained it took IT Corp. some seven hours to arrive on the scene of Monday night's spill. Levy said the spill response team did not arrive until 3 a.m., after having been notified shortly after the barrels were discovered at 8 p.m.