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Class project explodes at Henry school Chemistry experiment produces small fire, injuring nine students

By Aisha I. Jefferson

Nine Henry County High School students were treated for burn injuries and cuts after an explosion Friday in a chemistry classroom, fire officials said.

The explosion, which took place about 11 a.m., occurred when students were conducting a routine chemistry experiment, Henry County Fire Department Capt. Sabrina Puckett said.

"Methyl alcohol got too close to the flame, which created an explosion that produced a small fire," Capt. Puckett said. As a result, students were evacuated to the school's football field.

Injured students were taken to Henry Medical Center, Capt. Puckett said. All 18 students in the class were sent to a decontamination tent, where they were washed and rinsed twice.

Wearing a white decontamination suit, sophomore Porscha Armour, 16, said she saw some of her classmates with their arms, face and hair engulfed in flames. She said she also saw a piece of glass in a classmate's head.

"I looked up and it was like an atomic bomb (that) surrounded the whole classroom," said Armour,

Once she realized what happened, Armour said, she ran out the classroom screaming for someone to call 911.

She said the chemistry teacher put out the fire with a fire extinguisher.

Cindy Foster, coordinator of community development for Henry County Schools, said the classroom will remain closed until it is properly ventilated.

Students and staff were able to re-enter the building by 1:15 p.m., Foster said.

Both Foster and Capt. Puckett said this was the first an explosion has occurred at the high

school that they know of.

Foster said she isn't sure what will be done to enforce safety issues but does believe students will take extra precaution after today's events. The fire was not big enough to engage the school's sprinkler system and damage to the science lab was minor, Foster said.

Methyl alcohol, Ms. Puckett said, is a hazardous chemical that irritates the skin and can irritate the lungs if inhaled over a long period of time.

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