

8 hospitalized at educator event

HEAT OVERWHELMS
STAFFORD TEACHERS
AT CITY STADIUM

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Eight people were transported to area hospitals Friday morning during an event for Stafford County public school employees held at Virginia Credit Union Stadium. Officials said another 120 people required heat-related medical care on the scene.

Those treated or hospitalized Friday were among 4,300 people who attended the school systems' convocation for its

entire staff that began at 9:30 a.m. at the city baseball stadium.

Sandra Osborn, spokesperson for Stafford County Public Schools, said about two hours after the event began, a decision was made to cut the event short by about an hour due to the number of people struggling in the excessive heat.

"People were having heat illness," Osborn said. "We made the call at 11:30 to shut down and send everyone to get lunch and send them home."

About an hour after shutting the event down,

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the last remaining yellow county school bus used to transport guests to the stadium departed.

Although Osborn said the school system may have underestimated guest water consumption, she said she was thankful first responders were on hand to attend to those who suffered heat-related illness.

“We were very, very happy Fred city, the Stafford County Sheriff’s Office and the Stafford EMS set up an operations center,” Osborn said. “So we had planned for that.”

Griffis–Widewater Supervisor Tinesha Allen, who attended Friday’s event, said she witnessed personnel walking the aisles of the stands checking on people and asking if they needed assistance.

Allen also said water stations were positioned in multiple areas and medical technicians were treating patients in an air conditioned suite within the stadium.

“There was an organized area where people could go to get medical treatment,” Allen said.

But Fredericksburg Fire Chief Michael Jones said the event Friday morning came as a surprise. Jones said his department never had a conversation with Stafford officials ahead of the gathering.

“I think it caught us just a little bit off guard,” Jones said. “I think there should have been a more robust idea of planning on this event considering the weather conditions that we had today.”

Anna Stuck, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Sterling, said



PHOTOS BY TRISTAN LOREI / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Stafford County Public Schools employees return to their buses after multiple people suffered injuries from the heat during a personnel day in Fredericksburg.



A man from North Stafford High School runs with supplies for people overwhelmed by heat Friday.

when the event began at 9:30 a.m., the temperature in the city was already 81 degrees with a heat index of 86. By 11:30, Stuck said the temperature climbed to 86 with a heat index of 92.

Osborn said it was about that time that school staff started receiving reports of people at the stadium experiencing difficulty

with the heat.

Jones said that aside from the eight people transported to area hospitals, as many as 120 others suffered some type of heat-related illness that required a check of their vital signs—along with a cooling-off period with water and shade—before being released from medical care.

Stafford County Fire

Chief Joseph Cardello also said his department was unaware of the event when the county sent a fleet of rescue vehicles to the stadium at 11:13 a.m.

“There may have been some on-site medical staff, but Stafford County Fire and Rescue was not present or made aware of the event,” Cardello said.

Osborn said the purpose of Friday’s event was “to get everyone together for one big professional development activity.” She said attendees were introduced to the school’s latest strategic plan in preparation for the school year, which begins next week.

The event featured a pre-game show by the schools’ combined band and cheer teams, remarks by Superintendent Thomas Taylor and guest speaker Hamish Brewer, a former school principal and author.

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