

13-year-old boy shot at school by sniper

Child shot in Maryland suburb

BOWIE, Md. (AP) — The Washington-area sniper struck again Monday, shooting and critically wounding a 13-year-old boy as his aunt dropped him off at school, authorities said.

The shooting of the gunman's youngest victim yet heightened fear across the densely populated neighborhoods surrounding the nation's capital. Schools kept youngsters indoors at recess and lunchtime, and parents raced to pick up their children early under the watchful eyes of police.

The child was shot once in the chest before the start of classes at Benjamin Tasker Middle School and was in critical but stable condition at Children's Hospital in Washington. Doctors said they were optimistic he would survive.

"All of our victims have been innocent and defenseless, but now we're stepping over the line," Montgomery County Police Chief Charles Moose said, tears streaming down his face. "Shooting a kid — it's getting to be really, really personal now."

President Bush denounced the attacks as "cowardly and senseless acts of violence" and pledged government support to local authorities and schools.

Police say there have been no eyewitnesses and precious little to go on.

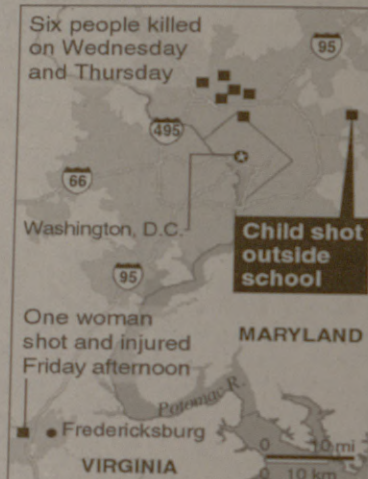
The sniper has shot eight people since Wednesday, killing six. Five died in Montgomery County within five miles of each other, and the sixth died on a Washington street.

The latest attack was 20 miles farther east, in neighboring Prince George's County north of Washington.

Ballistics tests found the bullet that struck the boy was identical to those that killed some of the others and wounded a woman in Virginia, said Joe Riehl, an agent with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

All victims were hit by a single bullet.

A 13-year-old boy was shot outside of school and critically wounded Monday in Bowie, Md. Ballistics tests linked the shooting to the slayings of six people in Maryland and Washington, D.C., last week.



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI AP

In Monday's attack, a shot was heard and the boy slumped over, telling his aunt he thought he had been shot, Prince George's County Police Chief Gerald Wilson said. Police cars surrounded the school and officers put up crime scene tape and searched the campus.

Schools in Montgomery and Prince George's counties initiated a "code blue" alert, keeping students inside during recess and lunchtime.

Sharon Healy had just sent her 12-year-old son, Brandon, off to Benjamin Tasker on his bicycle when she heard of the shooting shortly after 8 a.m. She said she ran to the school and pulled him out of class.

"You think you're safe, but you're only as safe as your next step," Healy said. Said her son: "I was scared."

Solar system find biggest since 1930

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A billion miles beyond Pluto, astronomers have discovered a frozen celestial body 30 miles across — the biggest find in our solar system since the ninth planet was first spotted in 1930.

Astronomers do not consider the newfound object a planet. Instead, it is believed to be icy debris left over from the formation of the solar system 5 billion years ago.

The object was provisionally named Quaoar (pronounced KWAH-oh-wah) after a creation force of Southern California Indian mythology.

It is about one-tenth the diameter of Earth and orbits the sun once every 288 years at a distance of 4 billion miles. It is only about half the size of Pluto, which some astronomers believe should never have been called a planet in the first place.

But "it's about the size of all the asteroids put together, so this thing is really quite big," said planetary astronomer Michael Brown of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena.

Quaoar lies in the Kuiper Belt, a swarm of objects made of ice and rock that orbit the sun beyond Neptune. The objects are considered fossil remnants of the swirling disk of debris that coalesced to form the solar system.

As larger Kuiper Belt objects turn up, the case for Pluto as a planet weakens, astronomers said.

"It's pretty clear, if we discovered Pluto today, knowing what we know about other objects in the Kuiper Belt, we wouldn't even consider it a planet," Brown said.

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SOURCE: Professor University of Illinois

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