

18 burned by faulty gym lighting

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COLUMBIA, Tennessee (AP) -- A malfunctioning light bulb in a school gym exposed more than 100 people to short-wave radiation for an hour, sending 18 to the hospital with severe sunburns and swollen eyes.

The incident occurred during a September 11 memorial event held Friday at the Baker Elementary School in Columbia. Attendees, many of whom were military veterans, said they started to feel symptoms soon after the event began.

"While I was sitting in the auditorium, my forehead started itching real bad," said Fred Young, 73. "When I got home I looked into the mirror and my face looked real red."

Most victims were older adults who were sitting together under the broken lamp. No children were admitted to Maury Regional Hospital, according to Dr. David Turner.

Dr. Michael Richardson, another emergency room doctor, said the symptoms, similar to overexposure from a tanning bed, were produced by a radiation leak from a halide bulb. The bulbs, commonly used in gyms, are designed with a special membrane that blocks the UV rays, but occasionally the membranes break.

The gym was closed during the weekend and by Monday morning the bulb was removed, according to Director of Schools Eddie Hickman.