

Watsonville Canning says firebombings threaten talks

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A firebomb was tossed at the home of a Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. official this weekend — the second such incident reported to police — and company officials say the bombings, presumably carried out by strikers, are threatening negotiations.

The home of Larry Allen Vawter, Watsonville Canning's personnel manager, suffered minor property damage including a scorched walkway and front porch. A plant on the front porch of the residence at 236 Martinelli St., Watsonville, was also burned.

A second firebombing incident took place at the home of Fernando Ramirez, Watsonville Canning's food plant manager, Friday night, causing \$5,000 in damage.

Vawter, 39, told police the incident at his house took place Friday night or Saturday morning, as he and his family slept.

Police believe a vehicle drove by the Vawter home and someone tossed a molotov cocktail — a quart beer bottle filled with flammable liquid — at the residence. It hit the walkway and burst into flames, scorching the porch slightly, but burning out before much damage could be done.

Vawter said he had checked the front of the house before turning in and found the signs of attempted arson the next morning. He said he did not hear or see anything suspicious; however his son, Ian, 12, said he had heard a "boom sound" at around 1 a.m.

Vawter also filled out a police report on an earlier incident which involved a small explosive blowing a hole in his roof. He said that happened Dec. 1 and it was strike-related. The repair cost was estimated at \$80.

Ron Trine, executive vice president of Watsonville Canning, said today the firebomb-

ing of Ramirez home and the attempted arson at the Vawter home have "created a serious problem for the future negotiations between the company and the Teamsters."

In a written statement, Trine said that a plan to stop violence has to be agreed upon before any negotiations can be successful.

"It is unrealistic to think negotiations can continue to be carried out with this constant threat to our employees and their children hanging over their heads."

He also pointed out that when area government officials demanded a stop to attacks against non-striking workers, the attacks stopped. He said that leads him to believe the violence can be and should be controlled by union officials.

Sergio Lopez, Teamster business agent, has called such firebombing incidents "totally deplorable" and "stupid."