

City Hall hit by arson attack

MINUTES LATER,
FIREBOMB IGNITED
IN SANTA CRUZ

City Hall
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Santa Cruz City Hall sustained more than \$400,000 in damage from an arson fire early Tuesday, and the local office of the California Parks Department suffered minor damage from another arson attempt a few minutes later, authorities said.

Officials believe the two fires could be related, but police had not identified any suspects.

"I'm just hoping someone will call and give us a tip," said detective Tony Parker.

Although the city is fully insured, the south wing, which received new paint and carpet but no sprinkler system two years ago, could be unusable for six months, officials said, adding that the city is fully insured.

The one-story City Hall, which surrounds a landscaped brick courtyard and fountain, dates back to the 1930s and is one of Santa Cruz's best-known symbols. The north wing, which was badly damaged in the 1989 earthquake and only recently restored, houses council member offices and the finance department. The west wing is the city council chamber. The south wing housed the city's human resources department.

All three wings share an attic, which carried smoke and soot into the two unburned wings. Secretaries and receptionists in the north wing huddled in coats and shouted over the roar of industrial fans used to air out the building. The outer wall of the council chamber wing was badly smoke-stained.

Finance department workers and some others got a day off.

"With a little cleaning and a little paint, some deodorizer, they ought to be back in" perhaps as early as today, said fire

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department investigator Ray Zachau.

The fire was reported about 2:15 a.m. and contained within 25 minutes, Zachau said. It was ignited by a "crude device made with ordinary, obtainable materials," apparently placed against an outside door, he said.

The heat was so intense that nails popped from the sheet-rock and stucco peeled off the outside wall at the east end, Zachau said. Firefighters ripped off roof tiles but then found they did not need to breach the roof.

Human resources head Erwin Young, who was allowed to go inside City Hall late Tuesday, reported that while furniture and equipment was "a lost cause," the agency's paper files seem to have survived. Computer files are supposed to be backed up on a network, he said. "So if everybody remembered to do that, we'll be OK."

He said his department may temporarily move to a nearby portable building used by the fire department during its own remodeling.

The fire at the state parks building on Ocean Street was spotted shortly after 2:30 a.m. Superintendent Dave Vincent said a firebomb in a plastic bottle was placed inside a second-floor niche that houses a vent for the utility closet and water heater. The sprinkler in the closet extinguished the flames quickly, he said, but there was water damage to the first floor. Offices were closed for the day.

Both City Hall and the Parks Department were hit in a wave of vandalism in 2001. That time the vandals used water hoses, doing minor damage to a City Hall conference room but causing more than \$250,000 damage to the parks building, which the department leases.

No one was ever charged in the hose attacks, which also hit a nearby insurance office, the city attorney's office and the public defender's office.

Police Lt. Joe Haebe, who had called the hose attacks "cowardly" and "brainless," had a similar response to the firebombs.

"We're known to be a city of peace and tolerance, and it's discouraging to think someone with this mentality is in our midst. It is senseless and serves no purpose," he said.

Police asked anyone with information to call (831) 420-5823.

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