

# Fire paralyzes SC City Hall

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SANTA CRUZ — It could take weeks for full telephone and computer service to be restored at City Hall in the wake of Monday's calamitous fire.

The small, intense blaze, which investigators said was caused by antiquated wiring and a portable fan left running in the basement, burned through a key utility trunk filled with phone and computer lines.

"Everything came together wrong to cause this fire," said Fire Inspector Ray Zachau as he surveyed the damage Tuesday morning. "There was old wire and an old fan. ... This fire could have happened anywhere. We see this type of electrical fire on a pretty regular basis."

The fan was left running by an employee working in the portion of the basement under the City Council Chamber where old personnel records are stored. That area also includes the city's nerve center of computer-networking and key telephone equipment.

As a result of the fire, telephones throughout City Hall were not working Tuesday, and that situation may not change anytime soon because of the extent of the damage.

"It's like Murphy's Law," said Zachau. "If you're going to burn up one room at City Hall, make it the nerve center."

A few satellite city offices have telephones, and calls are being routed there. These include the Parks and Recreation Department, which has been handling calls for many of the offices.

Jim Lang, director of Parks and Recreation, said his staff answered most of the calls Tuesday with only two phone lines. That hectic situation may not change today, although workers were trying to get a new cellular phone system running where each department would be able to take incoming calls.

In either case, residents' calls will be answered and messages delivered to the right people, said Lang.

Residents interested in talking

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fire inspector

with council members or the city manager's staff still may call 429-3550 or 429-3540, but only the voice mail is operating. City officials said, however, that those voice mail calls will be returned.

On the bright side, the city's Finance, Planning, Water and Personnel offices have access to their computer systems, which are not tied into the mainframe that was lost when flames chewed through key lines.

The fire also destroyed some electrical lines, which blacked out portions of City's Hall's police wing, the basement where the blaze started and the small room behind the Council Chamber where cable Channel 72 employees work to broadcast council meetings.

The fire destroyed cable equipment, which must be repaired before broadcasts will be restored. Tuesday night's council meeting was not aired, but the meeting went on without a hitch.

Earlier Tuesday, workers cleaned soot from surfaces throughout the chamber. Fire officials also purchased a special spray that eliminates smoke odor, which dramatically reduced the smell that had permeated the room Monday night and early Tuesday.

At the main library across from City Hall, the staff could not access the mainframe computer, but that didn't affect patrons. The computer system that allows readers to search for books was not damaged. In addition the phone lines to the

Please see FIRE — BACK PAGE



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Electrical contractor Bill Rees examines damage with fire Battalion Chief Pat Brown, left.

## Fire at City Hall

Continued from Page A1

library were not among those that burned.

The same can't be said for the Water Department, whose calls were being routed to Parks and Recreation. An employee then was running messages back to the Water Department, as well as other offices without telephones. Cellular phones were being used to return calls.

"I must say the customers are

being amazingly gracious about it," said Bill Kocher, director of the Water Department. "A significant amount of our business is done over the phone."

On the other hand, Kocher said, it's business as usual at the walk-up window, where residents can pay their utility bills. The department's billing computer is not tied to the city's mainframe.

City Manager Dick Wilson said a more complete report on which of

fices were affected by the fire will be available today after the regularly scheduled department heads meeting.

A key problem that forced crews to delay repair work was the asbestos found near the site of the fire. Specially trained workers must remove asbestos, which can cause serious health problems if inhaled, before repairs can begin.

"Even if it was a simple fix it would take a while, and it's not a simple fix," said Wilson.