

## Weather

Low Overcast Night  
And Morning With  
Sunny Afternoon

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121st Year No. 143

Sunday, June 19, 1977

## Santa Cruz



With black smoke rising from buildings beyond, Santa Cruz prepared to battle Saturday's fire at Salz Tannery which caused Fireman Roger Lawless reached for a ladder as firemen some \$10,000 damage. (Sentinel Photo - Bill Lovejoy)

# Fire At Tannery Causes About \$10,000 Damage

A noon blaze, which sent black smoke billowing into the air, caused "substantial" damage, estimated about \$10,000, to the A.K. Salz Tannery Saturday.

No one was injured.

The fire began shortly after noon, when an "explosion-proof" lightbulb ignited lacquer scrappings from an exhaust vent at the tannery, according to eye witnesses.

A workman who was closing the vent had apparently left the light inside the exhaust vent when he went to lunch, said Norm Lezin, Salz Tannery president, who was at the scene.

Another worker came into the area, saw the smoke, and turned on the fan, said Lezin.

What followed, according to witnesses, was a large flash and a quick flame.

"Someone started yelling 'fire, fire' on the intercom," said Foreman Dale

Wenger. "Then I yelled to evacuate the tannery."

"Something blew, man," said Wenger shortly after the fire began.

The fire spread quickly, according to workmen, and soon smoke and flames filled the area where the tannery's finished hides were stored.

Many of the hides were waiting to be shipped out to Santa Cruz buyers.

Firemen wearing gas masks and oxygen tanks fought the fire for 30 minutes before flames began to die down.

One workman said immediately after the fire began he saw flames shooting "20 feet out of the pipes."

Five minutes later, flames were licking the wooden building's walls and roof. By 1 p.m., firemen were beginning their clean-up operations.

Police officers cordoned off the area, in case chemical stored at the plant exploded or began to burn.

"We're going to clear people out just in case it does blow," said a police officer

The flames did not reach any chemicals, however, and there was no explosion. The fire began about three minutes after most of the workmen from the area went to lunch, said Wenger.

"That meant there was five or 10 people in there instead of 20 or 30. We were lucky."

Sprinklers in the building apparently were set off by the blaze but did not extinguish the flames.

"A window blew out right in front of me. I was scared," said one employee.

The fire is the second calamity to hit the tannery in less than a year.

On Sept. 9, 1976, chemical gas from a vat claimed the lives of two workmen when an employee mixed the wrong chemicals for a dehairing process.