

# Sprinklers douse fire, save bus depot

By Paul Rogers  
Mercury News Staff Writer

An early morning fire that broke out Monday in a small concession shop at Santa Cruz's Metro Center could have ravaged the entire downtown bus depot if not for a pair of sprinklers, fire officials said.

"That sprinkler system sure paid for itself," said Chris Veargason, a fire inspector with the Santa Cruz fire department. "We'll mark that down as a \$2 million save."

The blaze, which caused about \$75,000 in smoke and water damage to the Metropolitan Market, began about 6:30 a.m. when a stack of papers and magazines left atop a coffee warmer caught fire, Veargason said.

---

‘That sprinkler system sure paid for itself. We’ll mark that down as a \$2 million save.’

— *Chris Veargason, fire inspector*

---

gason said.

The market is in the lobby of the transit center, at 920 Pacific Ave.

Market owner Robert Tott said the warmer normally is not turned on on Sundays, and he speculated that he or one of his employees accidentally flipped the switch and left for the evening without realizing it was on.

The fire destroyed the coffee machine and gutted a refrigeration cabinet before a transit security guard spotted the flames and called the fire department. The market had not opened for the week.

Nine firefighters working with two engines mopped up the blaze, which had for the most part been

extinguished by the sprinklers before they arrived.

Santa Cruz enforces a strict "zero tolerance" sprinkler ordinance, which requires owners to install sprinklers on all new or remodeled buildings. Veargason estimated that the transit center's system, which dumped 200 gallons of water on the fire in five minutes, cost about \$20,000.

Wet or burned inventory, including food, made up most of the loss. Tott said the market will reopen in several days.

And although the transit center lobby was closed Monday afternoon for cleanup, no buses ran late.

"It could have been much worse," said a relieved Veargason.