



State Fire Marshal Division
445 Minnesota Street, Suite 145
St Paul, MN 55101

Investigation Report

Case

Case Details

SFM-2019-0030	Steinbach, John	Closed	Pleasantview Elementary
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Case Number

Lead Investigator

Status

Name

None	Accidental	
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Confidentiality

Disposition

Fire Cause

01/13/2019	21:01	01/15/2019	00:00
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Start Date

Start Time

End Date

End Time

Sauk Rapids		Sauk Rapids Police Department
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Primary Fire Department

Secondary Fire Department

Law Enforcement

Case Narrative

At 2232 hours on January 13, 2019 I received a phone call from the Minnesota State Duty Officer informing me Sauk Rapids Fire Chief/Fire Marshal Jason Fleming was requesting a fire marshal for a fire at Pleasantview Elementary School in Sauk Rapids.

I phoned Chief Fleming and made arrangement's to meet him at the fire scene in the morning. I also emailed Deputy State Fire Marshal, School Supervisor Forest Williams to advise of the school fire.

At 0800 hours on January 14, 2019 I arrived at Pleasantview Elementary School in Sauk Rapids where I observed fire damage to a portable classroom structure located at the southeast corner of the property site.

I entered the school where I met with Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools Superintendent Aaron Sinclair who advised there was no staff or students in the school at the time of the fire. Sinclair also advised there are approximately 800 students who attend this school, grades K-5. School was built in the 1970's and there have been no recent problems at the school.

I then met with and interviewed School Building Engineer Mark Scherbing and School Building and Grounds Person Greg Robbins, see interview. I also met with and interviewed Pleasantview Elementary School Principal Aby Froiland, see interview. I also met with Sauk Rapids Fire Chief Jason Fleming who told me the following;

- * A tenant at an apartment complex across the street from the school discovered smoke and flames at the east end of the school and called 911 at 2101 hours on January 13, 2019;
- * Upon arrival smoke and flames were shooting out the east gable end of a portable class room structure;
- * Fire crews set-up and exterior attack initially to knock the flames down;
- * Fire crews then forced entry into a hallway corridor that separates the portable classroom structures and actual school building;
- * There were no fire alarms sounding and or sprinkler heads flowing as the fire was above the classroom ceiling in the attic space of the structure;

Chief Fleming then escorted me through the elementary school to the south end of the school building and then into a common hallway between the school and four portable classrooms compromised of two structures.

Also arriving on scene was Deputy State Fire Marshal/School Inspector Kevin McGinty.

I then proceeded to process the fire scene by taking photographs and examining fire damage to the structure.

Case Background

Tenant at an apartment complex discovered smoke and flames at an elementary school across the street and called 911. Firefighters arriving on scene made an exterior attack on flames shooting out the east gable end of a portable classroom structure. Crews then entered the classroom structure to extinguish hot spots in the attic space of the east classroom structure where an electric, forced air furnace is mounted to the east exterior wall of the east classroom structure. Fire investigation determined fire originated in the area of the electric furnace. Electric furnace is the most probable and or likely cause for this accidental fire.

Case Synopsis

Investigation Comments

Fire

Ignition Sequence

_____		_____	
Fire Cause		Area of Origin	
_____		_____	
Heat Source		Material Ignited	
_____	_____	_____	_____
Equipment Involved In Ignition	Equipment Make	Equipment Model	Equipment Serial Number

Fire and Smoke Spread Information

_____		_____	
Fire Spread Material		Fire Spread Avenue	
_____		_____	
Smoke Spread Material		Smoke Spread Avenue	

Fire Comments			

Weather

_____	_____	_____	_____
Visibility	Relative Humidity (%)	Wind Speed (Mph)	Wind Direction
NaN	_____	_____	_____
Temperature (Fahrenheit)	Precipitation	Lightning	

Weather Comments			

Property Summary (1 of 1)

Property

Pleasantview Elementary

Name

1009 6th Avenue North

Address

Apt/Suite/Room

Sauk Rapids

Benton

Minnesota

56379

City

County

State

Postal Code

Pre Fire Value

Content Loss Value

Structure Loss Value

Single story brick building built in the 1970's is an elementary school for grades K-5. In approximately 1998 two portable classroom structures were added to the south end of the school building. School building along with portable classroom structures are fully sprinkled.

There is a wood-framed, common hallway between the school building and classroom structures.

Classroom structures approximately 28' wide by 60' in length are lined up end to end in a V shape orientation.

Classroom structures are manufactured, double wide type mobile homes constructed atop a metal frame with axles.

Classroom structures are wood frame with vertical wood siding that includes its skirting. Classroom structures have pitched roofs covered with metal. Interior of each classroom structure consists of sheet-rocked walls and ceiling and carpeted floors.

Each classroom structure is separated into two classrooms. Each classroom is heated and air-conditioned by individual furnaces. Furnaces are forced air electric furnaces either mounted inside a closet in a classroom or mounted outside on an exterior wall.

Classrooms include student desks, chairs, staff desk and fluorescent lighting.

Elementary school faces east along 6th Avenue North in the city of Sauk Rapids in a residential neighborhood.

Property Description

Structure

Elementary school, including kindergarten

Unoccupied

Property Use

Structure Occupancy

Automatic

Yes

Not Operating

Alarm Type

Smoke Detector Present

Smoke Detector Performance

Full

Not Operating

Sprinkler Standpipes

Sprinkler Standpipes Performance

Interior of the main school building is unaffected by fire damage.

Interior of the common hallway between the portable classroom structures and the main school building has sustained significant water and smoke damage. Interior of the west portable classroom structure occupied by classrooms #3 and #4 has sustained minor smoke damage.

The east portable classroom structure occupied by classrooms #1 and #2 has sustained severe water and fire damage. Majority of classroom #1's sheet-rock ceiling has been pulled down by fire crews exposing heavily charred wooden truss rafters. Attic space is blackened and charred.

Plywood roof sheeting at the east end of classroom #1 is all but consumed by fire exposing the metal roof. There is fiberglass insulation hanging down from the ceiling. There are numerous pieces of fiberglass insulation lying on the floor and tops of desks and chairs in the classroom.

Inside the charred attic space above the classroom are numerous charred romex wiring circuits for florescent light fixtures that according to school staff were off at the time of the fire. I eliminated electrical wiring in the attic as a potential ignition source for the cause of this fire.

Fire patterns clearly show the fire originated in the attic space of the classroom at the east wall where an electric, forced air furnace is located. Furnace is mounted to the east exterior wall of the classroom structure. Furnace is mounted just below the roof eave and hangs downward.

From a ladder inside the classroom I observed the furnaces hot air output with exposed electrical heating coils. Furnaces hot air plenum made of aluminum is gone, melted away. Wooden building components including wooden sheeting and wooden frame work encompassing the furnaces hot air discharge are all but consumed by fire and/or heavily charred.

I could not eliminate the electric furnace as a potential ignition source for the cause of this fire.

Interior Exam

At the east wall of the east portable classroom structure there are charred holes through the gable end of the wall. I can see directly into the attic space. There is also an electric, forced air furnace with fire damage mounted to this exterior wall in the area of the charred holes at the gable.

Exterior Exam

Owner / Occupant Information (1 of 1)

Occupant Type

Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Permanent Street 1

Permanent Street 2

Permanent City

Permanent State

Permanent Postal Code

Cell Number

Work Number

Home Number

Email

Insurance Information (1 of 1)

Hanover

ZBXA671784

1900369985

Company

Policy Number

Claim Number

07/01/2018

07/01/2019

Effective Date

Expiration Date

\$133,000,000.00

Structure Loss Dollars Max

Content Loss Dollars Max

Insurance Comments

Insurance Contact (1 of 2)

Martin Mahowald

(320)-251-3751

Contact Name

Phone Number

Insurance Agent

Contact Type

Street 1

Street 2

St. Cloud

Minnesota

City

State

Postal Code

Insurance Contact (2 of 2)

Marjorie Meyer

(800)-628-0250

Contact Name

Phone Number

Insurance Adjustor

Contact Type

Street 1

Street 2

City

State

Postal Code

Property Details (1 of 1)

Property

Pleasantview Elementary

Name

1009 6th Avenue North

Address

Apt/Suite/Room

Sauk Rapids

Benton

Minnesota

56379

City

County

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Classrooms include student desks, chairs, staff desk and fluorescent lighting.

Elementary school faces east along 6th Avenue North in the city of Sauk Rapids in a residential neighborhood.

Property Description

Area

Structure

Urban

Zoned

Area Type

Area Description

Area Quality

Structure

Elementary school, including kindergarten

Unoccupied

Property Use

Structure Occupancy

Automatic

Yes

Not Operating

Alarm Type

Smoke Detector Present

Smoke Detector Performance

Full

Not Operating

Sprinkler Standpipes

Sprinkler Standpipes Performance

1

Structure Length (Ft)

Structure Height (Ft)

Structure Width (Ft)

Number Of Stories

Number Of Units

Wood Frame

Construction Type

Structure Type

Structure Material

Other

Wood

Pitched

Metal

Foundation

Exterior Covering

Roof Type

Roof Material

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Exterior Exam

Alarm and Security Services

Full	Yes		Yes
Sprinkler Standpipes	Smoke Detectors Present	Smoke Detector Locations	Fire Suppression
Closed And Locked	Closed And Locked	Closed And Locked	
Doors	Windows	Other Entrances	
Alarm Protection/Security Comments			

Utilities

On	Underground		
Electrical Status	Electrical Entrance		
None			
Fuel Status	Fuel Type	Fuel Company	
On			
Water Status	Water Company		
On			
Telephone Status			
Utility Comments			

Owner / Occupant Information (1 of 1)

Occupant Type	Last Name	First Name	Middle Name
Permanent Street 1		Permanent Street 2	
Permanent City	Permanent State	Permanent Postal Code	
Cell Number	Work Number	Home Number	
Doing Business As			
Owner/Occupant Comments			

Insurance Information (1 of 1)

Hanover	1900369985	ZBXA671784
Company	Claim Number	Policy Number
07/01/2018	07/01/2019	
Effective Date	Expiration Date	
\$133,000,000.00		
Maximum Coverage For Structure Loss	Maximum Coverage For Content Loss	
Insurance Comments		

Insurance Contact (1 of 2)

Martin Mahowald	(320)-251-3751	
Contact Name	Phone Number	
Insurance Agent		
Contact Type	Street 1	Street 2
St. Cloud	Minnesota	
City	State	Postal Code

Insurance Contact (2 of 2)

Marjorie Meyer	(800)-628-0250	
Contact Name	Phone Number	
Insurance Adjustor		
Contact Type	Street 1	Street 2
City	State	Postal Code

Witness Statement (1 of 4)

Witness Statement

Sinclair	Aaron	
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Other	
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Type

Employer

01/14/2019	Steinbach, John	
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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

--	--

Street 1

Street 2

--	--	--

City

State

PostalCode

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Race

Date of Birth

Driver's Liscense Number

Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools, Superintendent.
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Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (2 of 4)

Witness Statement

Froiland	Aby	
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Other	
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Type

Employer

01/14/2019	Steinbach, John	
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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

--	--

Street 1

Street 2

--	--	--

City

State

PostalCode

--	--	--

Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

Interview with Pleasantview Elementary School Principal Aby Froiland who told me the following;

- * She arrived at school yesterday at about 8:00 PM;
- * There was a community ed class going on in the gym;
- * She worked on a project in the schools planning room;
- * She left the school at about 9:00 PM;
- * The community ed class was gone;
- * She didn't smell or see anything;
- * No problems or issues at the school;

Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (3 of 4)

Witness Statement

Scherbing	Mark	
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Other	
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Type

Employer

01/14/2019	Steinbach, John	
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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

--	--

Street 1

Street 2

--	--	--

City

State

PostalCode

--	--	--

Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

Interview with Pleasantview Elementary School Building Engineer who told me the following;

- * Portable classroom structures have been there for at least 20 years;
- * There are four classrooms, two in each structure;
- * There heated by electric forced air furnaces;
- * Furnaces for classrooms #2 and #4 have been replaced with new electric furnaces now mounted inside a closet in the classroom;
- * Classrooms #1 and #3 are original furnaces, both mounted outside, to an exterior wall of the structure;
- * There's been no recent service work to any of the furnaces;
- * There is nothing on inside the classrooms;
- * No problems with the furnaces that also air condition the classrooms;

Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (4 of 4)

Witness Statement

Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Type

Employer

Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

Street 1

Street 2

City

State

PostalCode

Race

Date of Birth

Driver's Liscense Number

Witness Statement Comments

Agencies

Agencies

Primary Fire Department

Secondary Fire Department

Private Investigator

Law Enforcement

Agency Comments

Additional Information

Media Coverage

No Media Coverages tied to this Incident

Property

_____	_____	_____	_____
Mortgage Holder	Lein Holder	Tax Records	Contract Leases
_____	_____	_____	_____
Titles / Registrations	Zoning / Codes	Deeds	

Business/Personal

_____	_____	_____
Accounting	Inventory	Banks/Credit/Unions/Etc
_____	_____	_____
Business Personal Tax	Criminal History	Civil Litigation

Business Comments		

Conclusion

Case Conclusion

Based on my training, experience, scene examination, information provided to date and following the guidelines in NFPA 921 Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations it is my opinion this elementary school fire originated at the east wall of a portable classroom structure where an electric forced air furnace is mounted. I couldn't eliminate the electric furnace as the most probable and or likely ignition source for this fire. I considered and eliminate all other potential ignition sources. The cause of this fire is ruled accidental. This case is closed.

Respectfully submitted,

John W. Steinbach
Deputy State Fire Marshal – Investigator
Date Submitted:

Signature

Steinbach, John

Lead Investigator

Signature

Date Submitted