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Early Morning Fire Damages McAllen Ropa Usada Warehouse

February 10, 2013

Texas - A McAllen ropa usada warehouse struck by a suspicious fire at 5 a.m. Saturday still smoldered in some areas about eight hours after officials said they learned of the blaze. There were no injuries caused by the fire at 27th Street and Durango Avenue, but 35 firefighters responded, McAllen Fire Department Capt. Rene Del Bosque said. The cause of the fire at the used clothing warehouse was unknown Saturday afternoon, he said.

Interim Fire Chief Rafael Balderas said authorities believe the fire is suspicious because the building's burglary alarm went off about 3 a.m., when McAllen police responded and found nothing, he said. About two hours later, the fire was reported by an unknown male caller, he said.

"When we arrived the fire had already vented through the roof," Balderas said. "It was already going pretty good.

The fire marshal is investigating the blaze, he said.

Del Bosque said firefighters were not sent inside because of the danger that the building's walls might collapse.

At least two shifts of firefighters spent Saturday tending to the aftermath and checking hot spots among the clothes in the warehouse with a JMR Recycle Clothing Group L.L.C. sign.

A crane continued to remove debris from the building with a half collapsed roof as tall mounds of burnt, wet clothes sat in the parking lot of the warehouse near McAllen's foreign trade zone. A foreign trade zone is an enclosed area under U.S. Customs and Border Protection supervision, but outside the U.S.'s customs territory. In part, while in the zone merchandise is not subject to U.S. duty or excise tax, according to CBP.

Del Bosque said security personnel would remain at the facility during the night in case any hot spots flare up.

"It was gone before we got there," he said of the damage to the building.

Written by The Monitor

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