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Manhattan Fire Leaves Some Wondering If Money Has Burnt A Hole

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New York - A stubborn six-alarm blaze kept some 200 firefighters busy all day Saturday at a Morningside Heights street corner. The fire started just after 5 a.m. at a Citibank on Broadway at West 111th Street and was still smoldering by mid-afternoon.

It caused no serious injuries, but four civilians were treated for smoke inhalation and three firefighters were taken to nearby St. Luke's Hospital for minor injuries.

Authorities said the fire started in the basement — leaving some depositors anxious for the fate of their valuables in the safety deposit boxes kept there in a vault.

"Oh, my God! What happened?" neighbor Sara Stewart, 68, exclaimed when she saw her bank ablaze.

"I wanted to take out money. But also I have my passport in the vault," she said. Firefighters at the scene assured her that everything should be OK, she said later — but that it would take a some time for the bank to know for sure.

"I'm nervous," said depositor Frank Pelosi, 72. "The first thing I thought of was the safety deposit box. I hope everything in there is safe."

"We waited for a little bit, but the smoke was getting too heavy. We've been out here for about three hours now. I didn't know if the fire was going to jump over here so my husband and I woke the kids up and came outside," said Sarah Steiner, who lives in a neighboring building.

The fire also caused smoke and water damage to a restaurant and deli at 2867 Broadway.

The second-floor eatery is called The Heights, and the deli is on the ground floor.

By late afternoon, residents in buildings adjacent to the bank were still being barred from re-entering due to unsafe CO_2 levels.

Still, they were grateful.

"I'm amazed at how wonderful of a job they have done keeping it contained," said Megan Boone, 36.

"I guess there is no damage to the restaurant or the buildings. Amazing — and no [serious] injuries."

Fire marshals are investigating what sparked the blaze.

Written by Natash Velez / Kathryn Cusma

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