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Three Alarm Shop Fire In Portland Leaves Cars Broken

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Oregon - Firefighters spent nearly three hours late Sunday fighting a three-alarm blaze at an automotive shop in Northeast Portland. The fire at German Formula, Inc., located at Northeast 11th Avenue and Couch Street, caused extensive damage, cut power to the block and forced evacuations of nearby homes, said Gabriel Watson, a spokesman for Portland Fire & Rescue.

No one was injured.

Investigators are still at the site, trying determine the cause of the fire and extent of the damage.

The fire was reported just after 9:30 p.m. Sunday. As the first crews arrived, a thick, black column of smoke could be seen spewing into the air from a mile away. That noxious plume forced the evacuation of about four households, Watson said.

"Strong winds were blowing it into homes," he said. "That was enough to make incident commanders move people out of the pathway of the smoke. But their homes were never threatened."

Residents hopped onboard a heated TriMet bus that was called to the scene, allowing them to keep warm. When the winds shifted about an hour later and the smoke moved skyward, people were allowed to return home.

Small explosions inside the building forced firefighters to move back from the structure, fighting the fire from 50 feet away.

"You never know what you're going to find inside," Watson said. It could just be tires popping."

It took about 4,000 gallons of water to extinguish the blaze. Watson said the weather did not hamper firefighters.

The masonry building contained vehicles, car parts, paint and other highly combustible material, Watson said. The flames were so intense that they burned off the roof, he said.

German Formula, Inc. specializes in repairing vehicles made by BMW, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagon, Audi and Porsche.

Marie Normandin of Southeast Portland dropped by early Monday to see about the brand new Porsche she had taken to the shop to have a new part installed. Her car was among those totalled.

"I always wanted one, ever since I was a little girl," she said of the car, which she bought in November.

"It was my first one. I drove it three times, and now it's toast."

Written by Lynne Terry

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