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Fire Destroys Public Works Vehicle Storage Facility

A late-morning fire Saturday destroyed a Public Works Department's storage facility at 131 South Blvd., and a number of vehicles parked inside for the weekend.

No injuries were reported, either to the firefighters who fought the four-alarm blaze or residents who live nearby. However, two apartments in a 38-unit building just to the west of the Public Works facility were damaged by heat and smoke from the fire.

Officials were still assessing the damage Saturday afternoon, and did not expect to have an estimate of the loss before Monday. In addition to a variety of vehicles parked inside on nights and weekends, the one-story, 25,000-square-foot building also housed the municipal vehicle body repair shop and streetlight operations, as well as a range of small equipment, hand tools and vehicle tires.

"The Fire and Police departments did an outstanding job," said Village Manager Carl Swenson. "The police quickly secured the area, evacuating nearby residents, while firefighters brought the fire under control."

An automatic alarm inside the building alerted the emergency dispatch center at 11:01 a.m. and Oak Park firefighters were on the scene in a matter of minutes. One vehicle inside the facility already was engulfed, according to fire officials, and the blaze was quickly spreading to others nearby.

The mutual aid alarm was soon sounded and fire departments from nearby communities quickly responded. The four-alarm fire drew support from Bellwood, Berwyn, Cicero, Forest Park, Maywood, North Riverside, River Forest, and Stickney. The blaze was brought under control within about an hour and extinguished within another 45 minutes.

Swenson praised the speedy response of the many communities whose fire departments quickly answered the Village's call for support.

"The value of our mutual aid agreements with nearby communities is evident in a situation such as this," he said. "This level of cooperation is essential when circumstances of this magnitude arise. It is good to know that our neighbors are there to help when needed."

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Oak Park Fire
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Salvation Army representatives also quickly arrived on the scene, offering food and drinks to displaced residents and emergency services personnel. The Salvation Army even brought a cooling vehicle to provide aid in the event of a heat-related incident.

The area near the scene remained cordoned off late Saturday afternoon as investigators searched for the origin of the blaze and ComEd worked to restore electrical power.

Residents evacuated from a nearby apartment building were not expected to be allowed to return tonight. The Village is working with the Red Cross and Oak Park-River Forest Family Services to lend assistance to the dozen or so residents in need of shelter.

Oak Park had taken over the facility in about 1974. The building is believed to have once housed an automobile dealership.

The Village does have insurance on the facility and its contents.

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