

Blaze chars SUB hallway

by Gateway staff

Police say the fire that ripped through a hallway behind SUB theatre late last night was caused by arson.

"The burn pattern indicates it was a willfully set fire," Detective Bob Krewenchuk told the *Gateway*.

"It was not an accident," said Edmonton Fire Department Arson Investigator Captain H. Matheson.

Matheson estimated damage at \$25,000 to the building and \$5,000 for the contents.

Police have no suspects.

Smoke was discovered at approximately 11:20 p.m. by *Gateway* staff members laying out today's paper nearby.

Gateway staffer Peter Hammond discovered the smoke billowing out from the east hall door adjacent to the *Gateway* and *Ski Club* offices on the second floor SUB, and immediately pulled the fire alarm.

SUB caretakers identified the source of the fire but were unable to gain access to the backstage hallway through doors that appeared to have been jammed.

Said one janitor: "I had the hose out but I couldn't open the door (next to the *Gateway* door)."

The entire second floor of SUB quickly filled with dense, choking smoke. Flames charred the entire length of the hallway, and contents of hallway cupboards were destroyed.

Firemen were forced to enter the hallway through SUB Theatre because the doors were jammed. Three hoses were brought in to fight the blaze, and later, portable fans were brought in to disperse some of the smoke.

CJSR campus radio Director Steve Cumming said everything appeared to be all right after a cursory inspection of CJSR operations only steps away from the scene of the fire.

Gateway offices behind the hallway were smoke filled but appeared undamaged.

Asked about fire detection systems, Krewenchuk said "there definitely should



photo Jens Andersen

Firestations 3 and 6 responded within minutes to last night's alarm.

be (a sprinkler or smoke detector system)."

"You've got floodlights and curtains (in the Theatre), and you should have some kind of fire detection system."

"There could be people dying in a building like this."

Campus Security said this was the third arson on campus in the last year and a half.

Investigators said the fire was probably started with a match or lighter in crumpled up papers, and burned for about 45 minutes.

Krewenchuk and Matheson speculated on possible motives for arson. Arsonists

can be mentally disturbed, looking for sexual gratification, revenge, or insurance fraud.

Another reason for the high incidence of arson is "copycat" fires - people mimicking other arsonists.

"If we gave the news media a story we'd have to double our staff, just to keep up," Matheson said.

Matheson asked the *Gateway* not to sensationalize the story.

"The news media - *The Journal* and the *Sun* hate us, because we don't talk to them," (because of the risk of copycat fires), he said.

The investigation continues.



photo Jens Andersen

Choking smoke fills entire second floor of SUB.

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