

The fire that erupted outside the 26th floor of MTA Headquarters on Friday at 10:22 a.m. may have started with an electrical short on the parapet, left, leaving seared remnants of fiberglass insulation, at right, but no damage to equipment inside.

PHOTOS: ABOVE, BY LISA FLETCHER; AT RIGHT, BY GAYLE ANDERSON.



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Firefighters make way to roof area as employees evacuate in stairwell.



Fire trucks line Cesar Chavez Avenue.



The view from Regional Rebuild Center.



Smoke curls from the high-rise rooftop.



Fire hose is lifeline at Gateway Plaza base camp.

Media

FIRE!







HQ Roof in Flames as Employees Evacuate; Five Minor Injuries, Some Offices Water Damaged

By BILL HEARD, Editor
(Jan. 12) A fire that apparently started in lighting equipment and rapidly spread to insulation on a parapet above the 25th floor of the Headquarters building, Friday morning, forced employees to evacuate the high-rise and sent firefighters scrambling to reach the source of the flames.

No one was seriously injured, although four employees - one of them pregnant - and a city firefighter were transported to a nearby hospital. More than 100 firefighters from 25 companies and five ambulances, along with a phalanx of local media responded to the scene.

Although it was a scary situation and there was some initial confusion, MTA Security officials said the building was evacuated in an orderly manner. During an impromptu news conference, City Fire Chief Bill Bamattre complimented the MTA's "excellent evacuation plan."

At a meeting of the Emergency Operations Committee after the event, Chief Operating Officer Alan Lipsky praised employees' quick reaction. "Overall, I think we did a terrific job

	surrounds City Fire Chief Bill Bamattre.
	Office of CEO Julian Burke sustained water damage
PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD	
	Security Investigator Roy Romero inspects fire rubble piled beneath structural equipment.
	Security Director Dan Cowden checks damages to wiring.
	Seared remnants of fiberglass insulation. PHOTOS BY GAYLE ANDERSON
	View of parapet from 27th floor. PHOTO BY EDSCANNELL

in what was a frightening situation."

Alarm signaled evacuation

The fire was first noticed at about 10:22 a.m. An alarm was sounded to signal evacuation of the building. Employees who gathered on the bus plaza could see smoke billowing from the top of the building and flames licking over the edge of the roof above the MTA executive offices.

The floors above the executive offices contain heating and ventilation equipment, microwave communications equipment and the elevator hoisting machines. A helicopter pad is located on the roof.

When he spotted the smoke, MTA Security Director Dan Cowden and Security Investigator Roy Romero rushed to the 26th floor where they discovered a microwave room filled with smoke. Told that someone was on the roof, they climbed several more flights of stairs and found Building Technician Frank Porto.

The three men unreeled a fire hose installed on the roof, then went down a ladder to reach a vantage point above the fire. From there, they attempted to spray the flames until thick, black smoke frustrated their efforts. LA City firefighters arrived a few minutes later.

"We made some progress," says Cowden, "but, once the firefighters got there, they had the fire knocked down in a matter of minutes." By 11 a.m., the fire had been extinguished.

Treated for smoke inhalation

Romero later was treated for smoke inhalation. Porto injured himself in a fall and was treated. TOS Dietra Thompson, who complained of abdominal pain, and Secretary Arlette Nunley, who suffered knee and respiratory pains, also were treated, along

with a 37-year-old firefighter who suffered heat exhaustion and elevated blood pressure.

Employees from the Metropolitan Water District headquarters, adjacent to Union Station, responded to the situation by escorting some MTA employees to their building, where they were treated to a free lunch.

Firefighters efforts to douse the blaze caused minor water and smoke damage to the offices of CEO Julian Burke, Lipsky and Chief of Staff Maria Guerra. County Counsel offices on the 24th floor and some cubicles on 23 also were affected.

A post-event assessment by General Services and others found that the fire caused little beyond superficial damage. Arrangements were being made to hire a contractor to make necessary repairs as quickly as possible.

Loss of power to the microwave equipment affected communications with Metro Rail lines, but didn't disrupt service. Some Bus Operations Center personnel moved for a short while to a mobile operations center, but were able to maintain communications with the buses.

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