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News Release

St. Paul Field Division



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For Immediate Release
March 9, 2012
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Fire Investigators Determine Cause of Abby Theatre Fatal Fire

ABBOTSFORD, Wis.— The National Response Team (NRT) from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), along with agents from the ATF St. Paul Field Division, and State of Wisconsin-Department of Justice-Division of Criminal Investigation-State Fire Marshal's Office have completed the investigation into the cause of the Sunday's fire at the Abby Theatre, 216 N. 1st St., Abbotsford, Wis. One firefighter was killed and four injured during fire suppression efforts.

The cause of the fire was ruled to be accidental, announced Wisconsin State Fire Marshal Director Tina R. Virgil and John Schmidt, Acting Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC), St. Paul Field Division. Investigators said the fire started in the lobby area of the theatre and was accidental in nature.

"The ATF National Response Team and the Wisconsin DOJ-DCI-State Fire Marshal's Office have completed their assignments at the fire scene," Schmidt said. "Over the past six days investigators have taken countless photographs, inspected and examined artifacts recovered from the scene and conducted more than 60 interviews. The information developed was reviewed and analyzed to assist in determining the cause of the fire."

The ATF National Response Team departed Abbotsford today.

On Sunday, at approximately 12:16 p.m., the Abbotsford Fire Department (AFD) received a call of a report of fire at the Abby Theatre. Abbotsford immediately requested mutual aid from the Colby, Owen-Withee-Curtis and Dorchester Fire Departments. Three Colby firefighters inside of the theatre, suppressing the fire, became trapped following a partial roof collapse. Two firefighters were rescued and the third firefighter was recovered and subsequently died.

Due to the loss of life and injuries to the firefighters, the Abbotsford Fire Department requested assistance from the Wisconsin DOJ-DCI-State Fire Marshal's Office and the ATF NRT. The investigators worked together as a team over the course of the investigation to determine the origin and cause of the fire.

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“The Office of the State Fire Marshal at the Wisconsin Department of Justice has a long history of cooperation with ATF, and I’m grateful that we’ve once again been able to work together efficiently to help the various local communities, law enforcement and firefighting agencies affected by this tragedy,” Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen said.

Damage is estimated at approximately \$300,000.

ATF’s NRT, comprised of ATF personnel from across the country, responded to the scene to work alongside state and local investigators. The NRT includes a canine team, certified fire investigators, forensic chemist, electrical and fire protection engineers, and additional specialists. This NRT activation was the 5th this fiscal year and the 726th since the team was created. More information on ATF and the NRT can be found at <http://www.atf.gov>.

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