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Chicago Police Department
Chicago Fire Department
Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

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Joint City Federal Task Force Completes Fire Investigation

The Chicago Fire Department Office of Fire Investigation (OFI), in partnership with the Chicago Police Department's Bomb and Arson Unit and the National Response Team (NRT) of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has concluded its probe of the cause of the massive fire at the Buyers Flea Market, located at 4545 West Division, and has determined that its ignition was accidental.

The investigation also concluded that an electrical issue in a vendor's booth cannot be ruled out as the cause of the blaze. The point of origin has been determined to be in the vendor's booths located in the south portion of the market known as the outdoor section. The NRT provided invaluable assistance in mapping, excavating and examining the forensic evidence of the huge facility, along with extensive interviews of parties that could shed light on the circumstances leading up to the start of the fire.

NRT was also able to provide a graphic model showing the suspected source and travel of the fire and smoke that lead to the ultimate destruction of the market. Arson was ruled out based on witness statements, computer reconstruction of the events and video footage from multiple security cameras, which were constantly recording almost every area of the facility. The NRT responded to a request by the Chicago Fire Department's OFI for assistance in working this case, which required manpower far in excess of what the Chicago Fire Department had available.

The NRT brought in certified fire investigators and state of the art equipment that added a new level of expertise and technical assistance to the investigation. This was the first use of the NRT in Chicago and provided not only much needed help on the investigation, but allowed the federal and city teams to work together, which made for an even more productive outcome. José Santiago, Fire Commissioner of the Chicago Fire Department, thanked the Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for its invaluable assistance.

The owner of the property has stated that he will rebuild the facility. The Chicago Department of Buildings and the Chicago Fire Department will work with the planners and contractors to ensure that the new facility meets all applicable building and fire safety codes. This fire caused no loss of human life or civilian injury, as it was fought and extinguished.