

Police Arrest 1 In Cudahy Meatpacking Plant Fire

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CUDAHY, Wis. (AP) — Police have arrested a 25-year-old man and located another male who they believe may have launched a military illumination flare that caused a massive fire at a southeastern Wisconsin meatpacking plant.

Police arrested the 25-year-old in Milwaukee County on Wednesday evening. The other man lives in another state and has been located there, Milwaukee County's chief deputy district attorney, Kent Lovern, said at Thursday news conference.

"We do not believe that the fire was intentionally set by the suspects, but we do believe that these actions were reckless and that the safety of many people was put at severe risk," Cudahy Police Chief Thomas Poellot said.

The men were lighting off large fireworks from a nearby residence July 5, Poellot said.

A flare hit and ignited the roof of the Patrick Cudahy Inc. plant, the company for which the city was named, that night. The blaze lasted for days, gutted four buildings and caused an estimated \$50 million or more in damages.

It also prompted a temporary evacuation of thousands of area residents.

State Fire Marshal Tina Virgil said she expected others who may be involved to be identified "in the coming days." She didn't know the extent of their involvement.

Lovern said reckless or negligent conduct could result in criminal charges, but he didn't expect to make a decision about charges for several days.

There could be a delay since one suspect lives out of state, but officials are arranging for the person to return, he said. He wouldn't comment on the suspect's ages, but said the pair can be charged as adults.

It's not legal for a civilian to possess this military flare, Lovern said. He wouldn't comment whether the suspects' were in the military.

Video released to the public this week helped narrow down where the flare originated, Lovern said.

There was \$16,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible, but Lovern said he didn't know whether a tip helped track the suspects down.

Cudahy is a town of about 18,000 just south of downtown Milwaukee.

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The plant is owned by Smithfield Foods of Smithfield, Va., the nation's largest hog producer and pork processor. Earlier this week, in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, the company said the fire should not have a material negative effect on its business in fiscal year 2010.

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AP Writer Todd Richmond contributed to this report from Madison, Wis.

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