

# Multi-Alarm Blaze At Abandoned Plant Damages Homes

Maryclaire Dale, Associated Press

CAMDEN, N.J. (AP) — A multi-alarm blaze that burned for hours was declared under control after it consumed an abandoned tire factory in southern New Jersey and damaged several nearby row homes.

The fire in Camden broke out around 3:30 p.m. Thursday in the vacant Reliable Tire Co. factory building and burned fiercely for several hours. The company moved out several years ago, according to a report on Philadelphia's WPVI-TV.

The blaze was declared under control around 9 p.m. At least three firefighters were hospitalized for heat exhaustion.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Scores of firefighters from Camden and surrounding communities battled the blaze in near 100-degree temperatures. Smoke and flames were visible from Philadelphia and over a wide area of its New Jersey suburbs.

About half a dozen nearby homes were damaged, but no residents were reported injured. Camden County emergency management officials brought in buses Thursday evening to take residents to shelters.

Flames consumed the L-shaped brick factory building, which occupies nearly a full city block. By 7 p.m., the flames and heavy black smoke had subsided, although lighter gray smoke continued to pour from the building.

Firefighters were forced to take frequent breaks, shedding their bunker coats, gulping down bottles of water and using water-soaked towels on their necks to cool down from the intense heat.

A Camden Fire Department dispatcher said officials who were authorized to give information remained at the scene Thursday evening and were not available to comment.

Resident Emmanuel Lopez, 23, said he was sleeping with his 4-year-old stepdaughter when the fire started across the street from his home in the city's Parkside neighborhood. The two fled the home with Lopez's mother, and he went next door to help evacuate his cousin's 3-year-old triplets.

"All I could see is smoke," Lopez said. "I just wanted to get the kids out of the house."

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Lopez said he believes his house was damaged but was not able to return to check on it.

Several residents grabbed hoses and spread water on their homes and lawns in a bid to stop any embers or flames from igniting their property. Among them was 31-year-old Jackie Rivera, who was keeping a close watch on the fire along with her four children.

A cemetery separates Rivera's home and the burning factory, and she said its lawn was briefly on fire.

"Now we're scared (our home) might catch on fire too," she said.

Iris Bones, 27, was at work when the fire started, and she came to make sure her boyfriend and their four children — who range in age from 11 months to 9 years — were safe. Bones said she often sees people around the abandoned buildings and wondered if one of them could have played a role in sparking the fire.

"People are always just coming in and out of those abandoned buildings, it's a big problem," she said.

Rush-hour service on the PATCO rail line, which carries commuters between Philadelphia and its southern New Jersey suburbs, was suspended in the area at the height of the fire, but had resumed by 7 p.m.

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