



JOHN STANON/Staff Photographer

# Officials investigate temple fire

By Judith Doner Berns  
staff writer

Twenty-five federal and county fire investigators have been called in to investigate the fire which caused \$1 million damage to Beth Abraham Hillel Moses synagogue Tuesday.

Investigators initially were uncertain of the fire's cause. West Bloomfield Police spokesman Mike Madigan said Wednesday: "Arson is a thought in everyone's mind. Arson can not be ruled out at this time."

The apparent quick spread of the blaze indicates it had either been burning a long time or there was an accelerant behind it, Madigan explained.

"It could have been a deliberate accelerant or a gas line burst which would have acted as an accelerant."

Oakland County Arson Squad were expected to comb through the ashes Thursday, once the large pieces of debris had been moved out, Madigan said.

The night-long fire destroyed the sanctuary and social hall and leaves the 700-member traditional Jewish congregation without a building to hold Sabbath services and scheduled weddings and bar and bat mitzvah observances. The 35 township firefighters on the scene were able to save a small chapel and classroom area.

"We will rebuild. We lost our building not our congregation," synagogue spokeswoman Marilyn Rice of West Bloomfield said. The 90-year-old congregation is a merger of three long-time Detroit-area synagogues — Beth Abraham, Beth Hillel and Beth Moses. Beth Abraham Hillel Moses at 8057 Maple between Inster and Lahser roads was built in 1971.

INVESTIGATORS from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of the U.S. Treasury Department and the

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All that remained of Temple Beth Abraham after Tuesday morning's blaze were the support beams of the temple and card tables and chairs used the night before for the

weekly bingo games. Investigators were still checking the ruins late Wednesday for clues to the cause of the fire.

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