



RANDY DORST/staff photographer

Property loss topped \$5 million in a December fire at Forge Die & Tool Corp. on Eight Mile

Blaze at factory costliest fire of year

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

It looks like a building again. "The walls are up. The roof is up. We're on our way," said Jim Zachman, controller at Forge Die & Tool Corp., scene of one of Farmington Hills' costliest fires ever, Dec. 3.

Fire loss was estimated at \$5.8 million, including \$4.5 million to the contents.

"The total loss may go even higher once all claims have been settled," Fire Marshal Stephen Hume wrote in the Farmington Hills Fire Department's 1986 annual report, released Monday.

The 40-year-old building had no fire detection or suppression system. The fire was the first major blaze in the company's 15-year history at the site.

Ruled accidental, the fire started in an electrical discharge machine. An electric arc used to machine parts ignited the oil bath when the oil level dropped too low. Ten workers were inside the building; none was injured.

"An aggressive attack saved most of the building and contents," Hume wrote. "Many of the machines were salvaged and moved to another facility and were back in operation in less than a week."

Production levels before the fire

won't be regained until June. "We were prevented from doing any reconstruction from about mid-January to mid-February until we got a zoning variance," Zachman said.

FARMINGTON HILLS logged \$7.4 million in total fire loss during 1986, a year the city saw a 21 percent increase in fires, according to the annual report.

Fire loss for the year beyond that at Forge Die & Tool totaled \$1.6 million — "for an increase of only 3.6 percent compared to the 21 percent increase in actual fires," Fire Chief Richard Marinucci wrote in the annual report.

The three major arson fires were logged last year. Listed with fire losses, they were at Elias Brothers Big Boy on Halsted (\$458,800), Kitchen Wholesale on Grand River (\$160,000) and Beechview Elementary on Westmeath (\$84,820).

A fire at Heritage Park burned about 100 acres of brush, but did no serious damage. Three residential blazes of undetermined cause produced \$458,300 in fire loss.

These seven fires represent 92 percent of the total fire loss for the year.

Nearly half of all alarms in Farmington Hills involved medical emergencies last year, not fires.

Forty-one percent of the 3,255

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— Jim Zachman, controller
Forge Die & Tool Corp.

runs involved medical emergencies. Only 17 percent involved actual fires. Traffic accidents with injuries accounted for another 17 percent.

THE NUMBER of alarms, 3,255, represents nine runs a day — a one-per-day increase from 1985 and an overall increase of 15 percent from 1985. Medical emergencies totaled 1,923, up 28 percent.

Actual fires totaled 660, up 21 percent. More than one-third of all fires — 210 — involved open burning. There were 69 house fires, 49 grass fires, 21 apartment-condominium fires, 21 commercial fires and seven industrial fires.

"There was no loss of life or se-

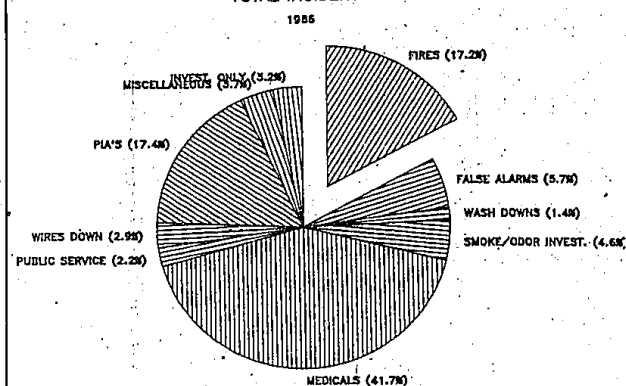
rious injury to civilians or fire fighters as a result of fires," Marinucci wrote.

Other department calls included arcing wires, false alarms, odor investigations, systems malfunctions, public service runs and bomb threats. The department handled 12 mutual aid runs to assist nearby fire departments.

The alarm total, 3,255, is more than double the total number of alarms the department responded to in 1977. Based on an analysis of alarms from 1980 to 1986, Hume forecasts 3,613 alarms in 1987 — a projected increase of 11 percent.

Most alarms in 1986 were received between 4 and 8 p.m. The

TOTAL INCIDENTS



A percentage breakdown of incidents handled by the Farmington Hills Fire Department in 1986.

least busy time was between 4 and 6 a.m. February was the least active month, April the most active. The average response time to emergency incidents from time of dispatch until arrival on scene was 5.4 minutes.

LAST YEAR, investigators probed 50 fires to determine cause — 34 were ruled arson, 10 accidental. The cause of six could not be determined. Police made arrests in two arson fires. They conducted interviews with juveniles in connection with three other fires.

Because false alarms and systems malfunctions increased 36 percent, the department instituted a new procedure that bills all occupancies \$20 for each false alarm beyond one in any calendar year. Fines go into the city's general fund.

"The fine is not intended to recover fire department costs, but rather as an incentive to have the system

repaired," Hume wrote.

A special effort was made to inspect all flammable and combustible liquids facilities to ensure compliance with new regulations. "As a result, many abandoned underground tanks were ordered removed," Hume wrote.

Last year, the most extensive leak of a storage tank at a recovery operation was at 13 Mile and Orchard Lake roads. The department continues to monitor such operations.

"Approximately 10,000 gallons of gasoline have been recovered from the ground and recovery operations are still in progress," Hume wrote. Also in 1986, the fire department reviewed 277 site plans, 84 building plans and 38 fire suppression systems.

Thirty-one court summonses were issued for fire code violations. The court levied fines averaging \$30 for each violation.

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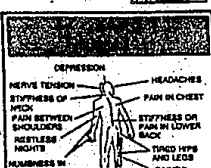
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