

Plastics firm hit by early morning blaze

By Phil Ginotti
special writer

An early morning fire Wednesday gutted the 40200 Grand River plastic plant at 40200 Grand River, west of Haggerty — less than a mile from the Farmington Hills border. Damage was estimated at \$4 to \$5 million.

The plant, which manufactures bathtubs, skylights and tub enclosures, sustained severe damage to a manufacturing and warehousing area, and smoke damage in business offices at the front of the 87,000-square-foot facility.

Novi Fire Chief Arthur Lenaghan said the cause of the blaze is being investigated, but there were strong hints that it may have started in wooden pallets stored against an outside wall of the building.

The fire department put out a minor pallet fire at Novi American two days ago, Lenaghan said.

"It looks like it started in the wooden pallets . . . this time, there must have been a window open or something and it got into the building," Lenaghan said. "But it'll be investigated."

Lenaghan said the Michigan State Police fire marshal has been called in to help with the investigation. A fire marshal photographer was on the scene Wednesday.

Firefighters got the call at about 3:15 a.m. Fire companies from Walled Lake and the City of Northville also responded. About 35 firefighters fought the blaze. Farmington Hills firefighters also assisted.

WITHIN AN hour of the alarm, the roof caved in and the west cinderblock wall of the building collapsed, exposing piles of melted, burning plastics. Fire crews were on the scene much of the day Wednesday, attempting to expose and extinguish the burning layers of plastic.

"I hate these kinds of fires," said Walled Lake Fire Chief Billy Friar. "These are the worst. You've got to dig and dig, and it takes all day to get to it."

There were no apparent injuries by late Wednesday morning.

Lenaghan reported difficulty getting fire crews close enough to the burning building when they first arrived on the scene. They used the Red Timbers restaurant parking lot next door and brought fire lines in by hand, he said. The plastics facility — designed in 1965, with various additions over the last two decades — had driveways and parking lots which weren't wide enough for fire apparatus, Lenaghan said.

City of Novi Water Department officials were also concerned that a water line serving Novi American and several buildings to the rear of it

may be contaminated because of the fire. The water department crews couldn't get close enough to the fire to determine if any contamination may have taken place, or if water service was disrupted.

NOVI AMERICAN owner Phillip Daniels said the company will remain in business since it has other manufacturing facilities outside, and a warehouse to the rear of the Grand River facility.

"Business will continue, probably at a reduction of about 20 percent," he said. "It'll be tough, but we'll manage."

Daniels said most current orders should be filled on schedule.

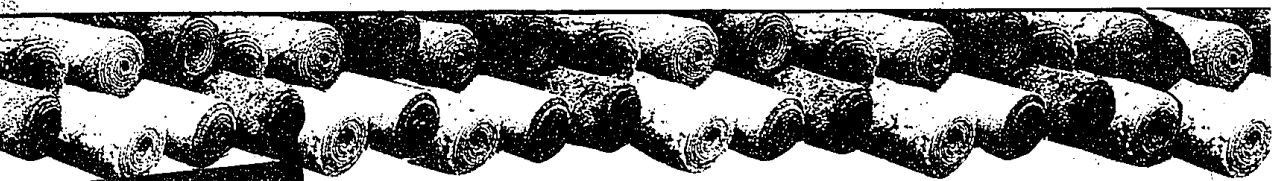
The \$4.5 million figure, which was Daniels' estimate, is believed to be the biggest dollar loss in Novi fire history.



Firefighters stand on the collapsed west wall of Novi American plastics on Grand River. Smoke could be seen in western Farmington Hills all Wednesday morning.



Blowing smoke engulfs firefighters as they watch for piles of plastic to flame up.



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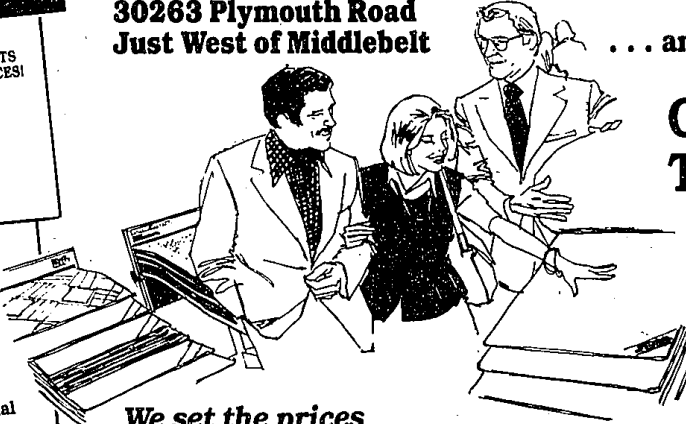
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