



ATF News

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
Houston Field Division

CONTACT: Franceska Perot, Ph.D.
Special Agent, PIO
(281) 372-2908 (office)
(281) 914-8114 (cell)

For Immediate Release
March 30, 2007

ATF'S NATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM ACTIVATED TO FATAL HOUSTON FIRE

HOUSTON – The National Response Team (NRT) of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) along with ATF special agents from the Houston Field Office have been activated to assist the Houston Fire Department in the investigation of a March 28 fire that killed three people and injured six others at a mid-rise office building in Houston.

Dewey Webb, Special Agent in Charge of ATF in Houston, said damage estimates to the six-story building at 9343 East Loop 610 exceeded \$5 million. All of the fatalities were occupants of the building and three of the injured were firefighters, he added.

“ATF is assisting the Houston Fire Department in the joint investigation of this tragic event,” Webb added.

The NRT has been activated but is on standby until the building can be stabilized. It is expected that the team will be on scene early next week. In the meantime agents and officers from ATF's Arson and Explosives Task Force in Houston are assisting in the initial assessments of the fire scene.

In 1978, ATF developed the NRT to assist federal, state and local investigators in meeting the challenges faced at the scenes of significant arson and explosives incidents. The NRT consists of four teams organized geographically to cover the United States. Each team can respond within 24 hours to assist state and local law enforcement/fire service personnel in onsite investigations.

In addition to investigating hundreds of large fire scenes, the NRT has also been activated to scenes such as the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing and the 9/11 Pentagon crash site, as well as explosions at explosives and ammunition manufacturing plants, legal fireworks factories and illegal explosive device manufacturing operations.

--more--

The teams are each composed of veteran special agents who have post blast and fire origin-and-cause expertise; forensic chemists; explosives enforcement officers; fire protection engineers; accelerant detection canines; explosives detection canines; intelligence support, computer forensic support and audit support. The teams work alongside state and local officers in reconstructing the scene, identifying the seat of the blast or origin of the fire, conducting interviews, and sifting through debris to obtain evidence related to the bombing/arson.

Further complementing the team's efforts are technical, legal and intelligence advisors. Moreover, a fleet of fully equipped response vehicles strategically located throughout the United States is available to provide logistical support.

This will be the NRT's 13th activation this fiscal year and the 630th activation since the inception of the NRT in 1978.

ATF is the federal agency with jurisdiction for investigating fires and crimes of arson. More information on ATF can be found at www.atf.gov.

###