



News Release



Houston Field Division

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ATF NATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM ACTIVATED TO INVESTIGATE SPA MANUFACTURER FIRE IN HOUSTON

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 Division have been activated by a request from the Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office to investigate a fire at Sunbelt Spas. The fire at the spa manufacturer located at 8500 Hwy 6 South, Houston, Texas occurred on Friday, January 23, 2009. The team of about 20 agents and specialists will start the scene investigation tomorrow morning. Some of the local agents and investigators are already onsite.

“ATF is investigating this fire jointly with the Fort Bend County Fire Marshal's Office. We will work together in partnership to determine the origin and cause of this fire,” said Dewey Webb, ATF Special Agent in Charge of the Houston Field Division. He estimates that damage to the building to be approximately \$6.5 million. This is the 11th activation of the NRT in Fiscal Year 2009, and the 669th activation since the inception of the team in 1978.

Other local activations of the NRT in the area include the midrise fatality fire in Houston in March 2007, the Governor's Mansion in Austin in June 2008, the Lone Star Saloon fire in Richmond in November 2008, the JK Chevrolet fire in Nederland in December 2008 and most recently the Ringgold School fire in Rio Grande City last week.

In 1978, ATF developed the NRT to investigate in partnership with 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 work jointly with 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.

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 forensic 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.

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.

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