



News Release



Charlotte Field Division

Contact: ATF PIO Earl Woodham
Cell: 704-591-5005

For Immediate Release
December 2, 2008

ATF NATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM ACTIVATED TO SPRUCE PINE, NC *Second ATF NRT Response to Spruce Pine in 16 Months*

SPRUCE PINE, N.C. – The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) National Response Team, along with ATF special agents from the Charlotte Field Division, have entered the investigation of a large commercial fire that occurred Saturday, November 29, at the Unimin Industrial Plant, 7638 US Highway 226, in Spruce Pine, NC. The NRT responded at the request of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation.

Zebedee T. Graham, special agent in charge of the ATF Charlotte Field Division, said that the business suffered significant fire, smoke and water damage and early estimates of damages are not available.

The NRT has brought definitive expertise and an array of state-of-the-art equipment to the investigation of major fire and explosives incidents since 1978. Four regional components, organized geographically to cover the United States, comprise the NRT. The team can respond within 24 hours to assist state and local law enforcement or fire service personnel in onsite investigations.

The responding NRT component normally has 18 members, including 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; and intelligence, computer forensic and audit support. A fleet of fully equipped response vehicles strategically located throughout the United States provides logistical support. The responding NRT Team Special Agent in Charge is Jeff Fulton from St. Louis, Missouri and the NRT Team Supervisor is Supervisory Special Agent Brian Hoback stationed in Houston, Texas.

ATF's partnership with federal, state and local officers is vital to the most effective processing efforts at an explosives or fire scene. The NRT capitalizes on that by working alongside its partners in reconstructing the scene, identifying the seat of the blast or the origin of the fire, conducting interviews and sifting through debris to obtain evidence related to the fire.

-more-

In addition to investigating hundreds of large fire and explosives scenes, the NRT trucks were deployed for the 2001 terrorist attack on the Pentagon; the Olympics and other major sporting events in the United States; presidential inaugurations and the national political conventions; and major international conferences.

This is the 5th NRT activation in the Carolinas over the past 18 months, including a previous activation in Spruce Pine, Salisbury and Robbins, NC and Charleston, SC. The NRT program began in 1978. Numerous local and regional fire departments responded to the initial fire call and successfully suppressed the fire. Other agencies involved in the ongoing investigation are the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, North Carolina Emergency Management, and the Emergency Management Services of Mitchell, Buncombe and Burke Counties.

For more information on ATF and its programs, visit the website: www.atf.gov

###