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News

Cause of junkyard fire still unknown

By Abraham Aboraya | February 16, 2011

WINTER SPRINGS - More than two weeks later, the cause of a two-alarm blaze at a Winter Springs junkyard remains a mystery, but the owner has his suspicions: arson.

Bart Phillips, the owner of 419 Metal and Auto Salvage, said the 100 bales of crushed cars and metal that caught fire for nearly 12 hours hadn't been sitting untouched by workers for two weeks when the fire started.

He said that his business is expanding into Cocoa and Wildwood and that he's been "stepping on some people's toes."

But was the Jan. 29 fire arson?

"That's what we kind of think," Phillips said, adding that someone may be trying to block their expansion. "That's just a possibility. No one knows for sure. But where [the fire] started, where it got lit, it just doesn't make sense."

The fire was started in a stack of about 100 bales of crushed metal, stacked more than 15 feet high and weighing 2,000 to 3,000 pounds per bale. The bales were a combination of crushed cars and crushed washing machines and other metal. Overall, Phillips said the fire destroyed about \$20,000 worth of materials.

Phillips and another employee operated an excavator, a large crane with an arm shaped like the claw in a crane machine, to pick apart the pile to help firefighters tackle the blaze.

The fire was knocked down after a few hours, but crews continued to monitor the area for flare-ups until 10 a.m. the next morning.

It took a total of 23 fire trucks, including the personal vehicles of battalion chiefs, and about 50



Arson may have been the cause of the auto salvage fire.

firefighters to knock down the blaze, said Greg Kirby, spokesman for Seminole County Fire Department.

Kirby said the flames were 50 to 100 feet in the air and had a blue tinge from magnesium.

"It was pretty big," Kirby said. "It was pretty impressive from the roadside."

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection made an appearance that night to monitor any environmental consequences from the fire. Calls to the FDEP were not returned before press time, but Kirby said there was concern about the runoff from the fire.

But, he said, it looked like the runoff was contained to a nearby retention pond.

He said there was no smoke or heat damage to nearby Layer Elementary School, either.

You may be thinking that a stack of crushed metal may not be the most likely source of timber.

Not so, Kirby said.

"Everything burns," Kirby said. "With the crushed cars, they take everything of value out, but you may have some upholstery, some plastic."

Overall, Phillips said he wants people to know the fire didn't set his business back or shut it down.

"Were back up and operating 100 percent Monday morning," Phillips said. "We cleaned up and were working Monday morning. It's one of those things that did happen. I'd love to say I know why it happened and it's not gonna happen again, but unfortunately, I can't."

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