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Foam used to fight recycling plant fire in New York

The fire started when a worker was apparently doing some repairs to the metal building with a torch and ignited insulation in a wall

By T.J. Pignataro
The Buffalo News

BUFFALO, N.Y. — More than 100 suburban firefighters were assisted by their counterparts from Buffalo Niagara International Airport on Monday afternoon in cooling a large industrial fire at Twin Village Recycling on Broadway in Depew.

The airport firefighters brought their fire-retardant foam to the scene of the hotly burning blaze that was apparently touched off just before 4 p.m. by an accident with a worker's torch and consumed a pair of metal buildings at the company's 4153 Broadway facility.

Heavy black smoke poured into the air and could be readily seen around Western New York. The fire spread quickly, according to Depew Fire Chief Gary Cummings.

Company officials said the fire started when a worker was apparently doing some repairs to the metal building with a torch and accidentally ignited some insulation in a wall of the building. The flames raced through the walls and then into the ceiling, Cummings said.

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"We had a number of propane tanks in the building — three of them went off — and there were still eight to 10 smaller tanks inside," Cummings said. "That's why we went to a defensive fire right away."

The fire then began consuming the contents of the buildings, which included a mix of ordinary combustibles and metal recycling materials. The burning metal made the temperature of the fire increase dramatically. That's where the foam from the airport helped.

"It actually works better than water because it cools [the fire] down," Cummings said. "We got a lot of metal in there. We lost two structures."

Broadway was shut down to traffic eastbound at Dick Road throughout the evening as large five-inch fire hoses snaked their way for hundreds of yards from a water main at Dick and Broadway down to the fire scene.

Officials from the state Department of Environmental Conservation also responded to the scene because of the materials being consumed by the blaze, believed to include aluminum, copper, brass, batteries and

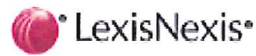
other metals. Water and air samples were being tested, Cummings said.

The fire chief said residents in the immediate vicinity of the fire were told to stay in their homes because of the potential for toxic smoke. No serious injuries were reported. Two firefighters were taken by ambulance to the hospital for treatment of heat exhaustion.

After the main body of the fire was brought under control, Cummings said, fire crews focused on the many "hot spots" that remained. Firefighters expected to remain on scene into the night.

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