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February 3, 2003

Fire Destroys BYU Hawaii Building

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Fire crews battled a potentially hazardous fire at BYU Monday morning. The flames broke out just after 10:30 and quickly engulfed a building that housed dangerous chemicals. The fire happened just behind the Polynesian Cultural Center.

BYU Hawaii's Judd Whetten was doing a routine inspection of this area when he noticed smoke.

"It was coming out heavy at this point, looks like it was burning for just a few minutes. The smoke was coming out of this building, a storage area for hazardous materials. We have flourescnet light tubes, oil, chemicals from the chemistry department," says Whetten.

As firefighters put out the hot spots, HAZMAT crews suited up to go into the building.

Firefighters say a chemical reaction sparked the fire.

"The closest dorms were a 100 yards away, most of students are in classes but the fire left extensive damage," says Whetten.

The roof is gone, the building gutted and to add to the loss the storage area was built less than a year ago.

"We spent, I don't know, 40,000 dollars. The bigger thing is safety of people involved," says Whetten.

HAZMAT crews are going through decontamination, then once the building is cleared, investigators will go in.

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