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PRESS RELEASE

From: Fire Chief Andrew Murray

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Massive Boatyard Fire Accidental

Spark During Boat Repair Likely Ignited Gasoline Vapors

MATTAPOISETT—The fire that destroyed buildings, cars, and boats at the Mattapoissett Boatyard on Friday was most likely caused by the ignition of gasoline vapors during the replacement of a boat's gas tank, said Mattapoissett Fire Chief Andrew Murray and State Fire Marshal Peter Ostroskey.

“Our hearts go out to the worker who was badly injured during last week’s fire and the family business that’s been a part of our community for 60 years,” said Chief Murray. “On behalf of the Town of Mattapoissett, I also want to recognize the efforts of our firefighters and our brother and sister firefighters and chiefs from across the region who rushed in to help. They defied the danger of a massive, wind-driven fire to prevent it from spreading further into the community and putting more people at risk.”

The origin and cause of the fire were jointly investigated by the Mattapoissett Fire Department, Mattapoissett Police Department, and State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit assigned to the State Fire Marshal’s office. That investigation determined that the fire began inside a building at 32 Ned’s Point Road, where a worker had been replacing a boat’s gas tank. Investigators believe that a spark ignited gasoline vapors during this process, causing an explosion and fire that seriously injured the worker, an adult male. The fire was fed by winds of up to 25 miles per hour coming in off the water and spread to nearby buildings, vehicles, and boats. In addition to the worker who was injured, three firefighters suffered injuries related to smoke inhalation and heat exhaustion. All four were transported from the scene for medical care; the worker remains hospitalized and is expected to survive, and the firefighters have been released.

“We’re extremely fortunate that Friday’s fire didn’t cause more injuries or worse,” said State Fire Marshal Peter Ostroskey. “Nearly 900 fires have started with gasoline in Massachusetts over the past 10 years, causing nine deaths and almost \$20 million in damages. Many of us use gasoline in our daily lives, but we can’t lose sight of the fire and explosion hazard associated with it. Gasoline vapors can travel a great distance to an ignition point, especially indoors.”

After receiving multiple 9-1-1 calls reporting explosions at about 1:20 pm, the Mattapoissett Fire Department responded to the scene to find heavy fire that spread to 6 buildings, 47 vehicles and 14 boats. The fire reached six alarms, drawing mutual aid from across southeastern Massachusetts and additional task forces through the Statewide Fire Mobilization Plan. In total, more than 100 firefighters battled the fire with 19 engines, 12 tankers, 3 fireboats, and 2 ladder trucks before knocking it down around 6:00 pm. “This highly coordinated and collaborative effort allowed us to contain the fire to the boatyard property and save all of the surrounding homes and structures,” said Chief Murray. The Department of Fire Services deployed an Incident Support Unit to assist incident commanders, a Rehab Unit to support firefighters at the scene, a Drone Unit to gather aerial imagery, a Hazmat team to monitor air quality at the fireground, and State Police fire investigators to work with local officials. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, Department of Environmental Protection, several area harbormasters, and the Coast Guard also responded to the scene.