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Student, 16, arrested after 3rd apparent arson in 3 days at Boston Latin School

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 11, 2012 06:51 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A 16-year-old male student was arrested today on arson charges in connection with a string of three trash-can fires in as many days inside Boston Latin School that are believed to have been intentionally set.

The student, whose name was not released because he is a juvenile, will be arraigned in court on the charges tomorrow, fire officials said.

Authorities said the suspected arsons remain under investigation.

"[The fire and police detectives] were very aggressive in investigating these fires and they were at the school most of today. They've put in a lot of hours," Fire Department spokesman Steve MacDonald said this evening, declining to elaborate further on the investigation because it remains active.

The fires at Boston Latin School have each caused minimal damage and no injuries, MacDonald said.

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Shortly after fire officials announced the student's arrests, administrators at the prestigious exam school and officials from the Suffolk County District Attorney's office said they could not immediately provide further information or comment.

"It's a dangerous game someone is playing and we're very fortunate there have been no injuries from these fires," the fire department spokesman said in an interview before the 16-year-old student was arrested at about 5 p.m.

The building, where about 2,300 students are enrolled, has been evacuated for about 20 minutes at a time each of the past three afternoons because of the fires, he said.

Firefighters responded to the school at 1:26 p.m. today after a fire was set in a trash barrel inside a third-floor restroom, MacDonald said. A school staff member was able to quickly respond and put out the fire using one of the building's fire extinguishers.

An investigative team that includes city fire officials and police detectives were in another part of the building investigating the previous two fires when alarms rang signaling today's fire, the fire spokesman said. Investigators remained at the building this afternoon.

All of the fires have been set in plastic trash barrels and whatever contents happened to be in the barrels at the time were used to ignite the fires, the fire official said. He declined to comment on the investigation other than to say it remains active.

"We're taking this very seriously," Boston public schools spokesman Matt Wilder said today during an interview before any arrest had been made. "If this is a student and they think it's a prank or something funny, the message we're sending is that it's not. It's dangerous and someone could get hurt. We're working aggressively with Boston Police and the Fire Department to find who is responsible and hold them accountable."

In an automated phone message sent out yesterday afternoon, Headmaster Lynne Mooney Teta informed parents of the incidents, the city public schools spokesman said. Another automated message will go out later today and will

urge anyone with information to contact Boston Police anonymously by calling the department's "Crime Stoppers" tip line at 1-800-494-TIPS or by texting the word "TIP" to CRIME (27463), he said.

Aside from the team of fire investigators, an added police presence was at the school today and an even greater law enforcement presence is scheduled to patrol the school tomorrow, according to Wilder. While the school spokesman did not have an exact figure for how many officers would be assigned to the school he said it will be "visible to the school community."

The fire department spokesman said firefighters responded at 1:17 p.m. yesterday to a trash barrel fire in the basement of the school. That fire set off a sprinkler head, which activated causing an estimated \$5,000 in water damage, MacDonald said.

Classrooms near where the sprinkler went off had to relocate to another section of the building yesterday afternoon so the water could be cleaned up, but were able to reopen today, he said.

On Monday, firefighters responded at 12:30 p.m. for a trash barrel on fire in a second-floor women's restroom, according to the fire department spokesman.

Located on 78 Avenue Louis Pasteur near the Longwood Medical Area, the school, founded in 1635, is the oldest public school in the country.

Former students have included five signers of the Declaration of Independence, according to the school's website.

Authorities urge anyone with information to contact Boston Police anonymously by calling the department's "Crime Stoppers" tip line at 1-800-494-TIPS or by texting the word "TIP" to CRIME (27463).

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