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Fire at JFK Library caused by discarded smoking material

By Matt Rocheleau | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 19, 2013

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The fire at the JFK Presidential Library and Museum in Boston Monday was caused by careless disposal of smoking materials, city fire officials said.

Boston officials had initially feared that the fire at the library might have been connected to the bombings at the Boston Marathon, because it was reported just six minutes after the explosions went off in Copley Square.

"In light of what had just happened at the finish line — and the library is of course a high-profile place in Boston — it caused a lot of speculation," Boston Fire Department spokesman Steve MacDonald said. "It

took a while to get to the facts.”

The fire broke out in an HVAC system in a section of the complex that opened in 2011 and houses offices, a classroom, and some archival material, he said Monday. The building was evacuated. No injuries were reported.

The library said Thursday that it will remain closed until further notice while officials fully test the building’s fire and security systems.

“We are grateful to the Boston fire and police departments for their quick and effective response to the fire on Monday, and their thorough investigation following the event,” the JFK Library said.

MacDonald said Thursday that the cost of the damage the fire caused has not yet been determined.

On Tuesday, the library said water reached a few artifact storage rooms. While damage to the collection there is “minimal,” the library said in a statement that “significant water and other fire protection damage” was seen in “other parts of the building.”

The Globe previously reported that the fire caused some damage to the exterior of the building. It blackened the area of what appeared to be a side entrance, and some windows were shattered.

“We feel fortunate that no one was hurt and appreciate everyone’s efforts to provide for the safety of our staff, our visitors, and our collections,” the library said. “The damage to our building is real, but insignificant when compared to the lives lost in the bombings downtown. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this tragedy and their families.”



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