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**DATE/TIME**

**12-27-2015 13:30**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Commercial Structure Fire***

**San Luis Obispo** - San Luis Obispo City Fire Department personnel responded to a reported commercial structure fire at 295 Higuera in the City of San Luis Obispo at 10:50 am yesterday morning, December 26, 2015. The first SLO City Fire Department unit arrived within 3 minutes of being dispatched and found a rapidly spreading fire involving the front and interior of the business known as The Sub as well as a connecting business, Square Deal Recordings & Supplies. The building houses retail space as well as a warehouse that stores vinyl records, cassette tapes, comic books, and many other combustible collectibles.

Witnesses in the area report hearing a loud explosive sound before hearing the sirens of approaching fire crews. Those in the area also report witnessing fire consuming the front of the retail area of the business with flames billowing out the front windows and extending above the roofline of the single story structure. This photo, provided to the San Luis Obispo Fire Department by a resident who lives across the street, shows the fire conditions before the arrival of initial attack crews.





Crews immediately began firefighting operations including attacking the fire from the interior and having a truck company cut holes in the roof to help remove the smoke and extreme heat. Interior crews were met with a heavy volume of fire that was deep seeded in the business and fuelled by stacks of highly combustible synthetic materials as high as 18 feet tall. These crews described the presence of fire already engulfing the area above their heads. Interior crews were forced out of the building by the heavy heat and smoke caused by the excessive fire load.

Additional crews, armed with hoselines and tools, then entered the warehouse area to the rear of the retail area in an effort to stop the forward progress of the fire. However, openings in the firewall allowed the intense fire to reach the stacks of highly combustible synthetic materials. The fire then surrounded the attacking crews, and they were pulled out before their exit was cut off by the tons of flaming debris falling from wall-to-wall storage racks that reached up toward the ceiling. The remainder of firefighting efforts were conducted exclusively from the exterior of the building, with smoke conditions so intense that crews operating on the south side of the structure continued to use self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) for many hours due to the consistent presence of acrid smoke.

An intact firewall separates the burning occupancy from the adjacent business, Quality Fabrics and Supplies. A fire crew safely remained in Quality Fabrics and Supplies all afternoon and into the evening monitoring the condition of the fire wall and removing water that leaked into the business. The fire did not extend into this business.

Fire crews remained on scene throughout the night to extinguish flares ups. By dawn, no visible fire remained, but the warehouse area continued to smolder.

Today, a team comprised of three fire investigators, the City Chief Building Official, a Police Detective, the Incident Commander and the Fire Chief inspected the area of the fire's origin. While the cause of the fire has yet to be determined, it is apparent that the fire spread quickly because the dense storage of highly flammable materials stored in the warehouse and the construction type,

specifically the apparent lack of “fireblocking.” A construction feature, fireblocking is installed in walls at the ceiling height to block or close vertical channels of a building to prevent rapid fire spread from one floor to the next or from the ground floor to the attic. While fire blocking was not required at the time of this building’s original construction, and therefore is not a violation, the absence of fireblocking between the retail area and the attic space provided an unimpeded path for the fire to quickly enter and engulf the attic, where it then burned toward the warehouse area.

Traffic continues to be restricted on South Higuera between Pacific and High Streets, which will likely continue at least through Monday. The City is working with PG&E and effected businesses to restore power to undamaged buildings. Fire investigations will continue throughout the week.

Please call Fire Chief Olson at 805-206-9765 with any questions or information needs.

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