Weekend arsonist hits CSC, Churchill

By

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News Staff Photo/Rachel French

Jordan Berry, editor in chief of The Caldron, looks through old copies of yearbooks to determine what sustained water damage from sprinklers that set off during the fire on the fourth floor of the Curry Student Center on Sunday afternoon.
A firefighter looks out from a broken window in Churchill Hall Sunday after a fire was started in a janitorial closet on the first floor. Paired with an earlier fire on the fourth floor of the Curry Student Center, the Boston Fire Department deemed the blazes arson.

Two fires on campus over the weekend were deliberately set, according to Lieutenant David Pfeil, a spokesperson for the Boston Fire Department.

The first fire started just before noon on the fourth floor of the Curry Student Center (CSC). The second was about two hours later in Churchill Hall. Both are still under investigation.

"The Student Center has $100,000 worth of damages," Pfeil said. "In the other building, Churchill, a janitorial supply closet suffered $10,000 worth of damages."

No leads or motives have been announced. The CSC was closed Sunday reopened Monday.

Jack Wright, operations manager of building services for the university, said Room 428 was the only office in the student center with fire damage. Neighboring offices on the fourth floor sustained water damage leading from sprinklers.

The office belongs to Sandra Miller, media advisor for the university's media-related student groups, including The News, The Cauldron, Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine, The Onyx Informer, NUTV and The Times New Roman.

Students and passers-by gathered outside the student center Sunday amid the broken glass, waiting to be let back in to the building.

"I got to the SGA [Student Government Association] office about, quarter to 11 and I was sitting right under a vent and smelled burnt rubber, like the clutch from driving a stick shift," sophomore electrical engineering major Christian Toczko said.

"I don't understand it. It is a waste of tuition money, it's a waste of time. It's just an unfortunate waste," he said.

At about 2:20 p.m., a female officer ran from the CSC to Churchill Hall, the building where the president’s office is located. She met with two other officers and grabbed fire extinguishers from the trunk of a police vehicle. The officer headed toward the bottom floor, attempting to diminish the smoke until fire trucks arrived about three minutes later.

Wright said smoke from the first floor of Churchill Hall billowed almost to the top floors, creating a cloud from the classroom building’s front door, leaving a door frame completely charred.

As a result of the water, several student-run media organizations’ offices endured damage, including that of The Cauldron, which lost hundreds of old yearbooks.

"Our best estimate is 300 completely damaged yearbooks," said Cauldron Editor in Chief Jordan Berry. "Extra copies of the 1995-2005 issues were on the floor in boxes, we were planning to sell those to alumni and through our Web site; technically we lost potential income."

Shocked by the news, Berry said she was surprised an arsonist would target Northeastern.

"I can't imagine who would do this; what is the purpose supposed to be?" Berry said. "When I got a message from John [Silveria] I thought to myself 'Oh my god,' this is senseless, just senseless."

Provost Ahmed Abdelal was doing work in his office in Hayden Hall when he came out to see the commotion in Churchill.
"We can only speculate why this is happening or what caused it," Abdelal said. With no leads and no discussion of possible motives, NUPD officers were trying to control the situation while protecting neighboring buildings, including Cabot Gym, where a basketball tournament was being held.

Officers stopped various passersby in connection with the fire, searching and questioning them.

On April 2, a fire scorched the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, causing $500,000 in damages. All three fires occurred on a Sunday in mostly deserted buildings.