Fires flare up in Curry, Churchill

By

Published: Monday, June 5, 2006

Updated: Sunday, September 7, 2008

Firefighters responded to a pair of on-campus fires Sunday, the first around noon on the fourth floor of the Curry Student Center, and the second two hours later in Churchill Hall.

"I heard it started in [room] 428 in the Curry Student Center," said Jack Wright, operations manager of building services for the university.

Wright said 428 was the only office with fire damage, but said neighboring offices on the fourth floor of the student center sustained water damage from sprinklers.

The office is that of Sandra Miller, media advisor for the university's media-related student groups, including The News, The Cauldron, The Spectrum, The Onyx and NUTV and The Times New Roman.

Students and passersby gathered outside the student center amid the broken glass, waiting to be let back in to the building - which officers did not allow.

At about 2:20 p.m., a female officer ran from the Curry Student Center to Churchill Hall, where she met with two other officers and grabbed fire extinguishers from the trunk of a police vehicle. She headed into 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 up almost to the top floors, creating a cloud issuing from the classroom building’s front door and leaving a door frame completely charred.

Provost Ahmed Abdelal was doing work in his office in Hayden Hall when he came out to see the commotion.

"We can only speculate why this is happening or what caused it," Abdelal said. With no leads and no officers discussing possible motives, the Northeastern Police Department officers were trying to control the situation while protecting neighboring buildings, including Cabot Gym, where a basketball tournament was being held.

Officers stopped and questioned 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. The fires today, like the previous, occurred on a Sunday in a generally-deserted building connected to the underground tunnel system.

Cleaning will be done throughout the night, Wright said, with the hope that the student center can be reopened by Monday.