

## Heater suspected in condo blaze

Fuel-based heaters used in drywalling were at the project site, the fire department says

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**NEW WESTMINSTER |** New Westminister firefighters suspect a fire that destroyed part of a \$20-million condominium project Wednesday may have been caused by fuel-based heaters used during construction.

Fire raged through the Pointe of View Developments' four-storey Copperstone project at about 5 p.m. Wednesday, gutting 26 units.

It took 50 firefighters more than four hours to get the fire under control. They were still putting out spot fires at the site, at 210 Sherbrooke St. near Royal Columbian Hospital, on Thursday afternoon.

This is the second Pointe of View project to be destroyed by fire. In 2003, a \$10-million project in Calgary was razed to the ground by an arsonist -- just one month before 183 families were set to move in.

But New Westminister deputy fire chief Jim Cook said arson is not suspected in this blaze.

Although firefighters don't have any conclusive evidence, he said, they are investigating whether fuel-based heaters were being used when the fire broke out.

Crews had been putting in drywall on the fourth floor, which typically involves using heaters -- fuelled by propane or diesel -- to accelerate the drying process.

Firefighters planned to talk to work crews on Thursday afternoon with a report



CREDIT: Bill Keay, Vancouver Sun

New Westminister firefighters were still extinguishing hot spots Thursday after fire swept through a \$20-million, four-storey condominium in Sapperton.

to be issued this afternoon.

"Right now we're investigating that as one of the possible causes," Cook said. "We know they were likely present on the property but not if they had been activated."

He said firefighters were hindered in fighting the fire by the fact a sprinkler system wasn't activated. A ladder truck was brought in from Burnaby to help fight the blaze, which Cook estimated caused \$5-million to \$8-million damage.

"We got a good jump on the fire but it was racing too quickly through that part of the building," Cook said. "It was kind of wide open. It just raged through there in a hurry."

Clark Hogan, general manager of sales and marketing for Pointe of View, said up to 231 suites could be affected, depending on the damage to the neighbouring buildings.

The Copperstone project, which consists of three four-storey buildings, was 99-per-cent sold. One-bedroom suites in the project pre-sold for \$134,000 and two-bedroom and dens for \$241,000 when they were marketed in 2005.

The fire occurred just weeks before Pointe of View planned to issue possession notices to homeowners, Hogan said.

"The one that burned down was the one holding us up," he said. "We were just weeks away. We had to meet requirements by the city before we sent out possession notices."

It's not known how this will affect new homeowners, although Pointe of View said it intends to rebuild as soon as it assesses the damage.

"POV is going to honour our purchase agreement with the clients," Hogan said.

"At this point we don't anticipate a price increase."

The company sold more than 2,000 units in Alberta, Toronto, the B.C. Interior and the western U.S. last year.

In a statement issued early Thursday, Hogan said the company sympathizes with homeowners, saying it is "distressing for both customers and the company to have the completion of these homes further delayed."

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