

## **West Side inferno left some fire trucks with minor damage**

**By Brian Meyer NEWS STAFF REPORTER**

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Fumes from last week's warehouse inferno on Niagara Street caused minor damage to chrome and steel on some fire trucks, but city officials remain confident that firefighters won't face long-term health problems.

Still, more than 200 firefighters who were at the scene of the blaze in a pool supply company have completed hazardous materials exposure forms to ensure that there are records if they suffer from future maladies.

City officials released updated information Wednesday about the fire, which broke out June 2 at Leisure Living. Fire Marshal Sal Colangelo said preliminary damage estimates approach \$12 million. The cause of the three-alarm fire remains under investigation.

In response to an inquiry from The Buffalo News, Fire Commissioner Michael S. Lombardo confirmed that fumes from the blaze caused marks he described as "etchings" on six or seven fire vehicles. The warehouse contained large quantities of swimming pool chemicals, including HTH chlorine. Officials believe the fumes from the stubborn blaze affected the chrome and stainless steel on some vehicles.

"They were in these conditions for a long period of time, and they were very close to the fire," Lombardo said.

How easy will it be to remove the markings?

"We're not sure at this point. A rubbing compound might take them off," said Lombardo. "But this certainly doesn't put any [vehicles] out of service."

If the fumes left markings on stainless steel, is it possible they also may have done yet-to-be-detected harm to those firefighters who toiled at the scene for many hours?

"We're very cognizant of these concerns," Lombardo said.

But he quickly added that firefighters wore breathing apparatus and that their gear protects other parts of their body from exposures. Lombardo checked records and said 30 firefighters underwent medical tests. Four missed some work because of injuries they suffered at the fire, including one firefighter who suffered a back injury. As of Wednesday, Lombardo said, all but one employee had returned to work.

Lombardo said officials are confident the fumes did not cause any health risks to residents in the West Side neighborhood. He noted that frequent wind gusts helped to minimize people's exposure to fumes.

Air monitoring tests were not performed at the fire scene, officials from the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday.

Fire officials briefed Mayor Byron W. Brown and his accountability panel Wednesday on the Leisure Living blaze. The situation would have been much worse if firefighters hadn't prevented flames from spreading to an adjacent building that contained huge quantities of chemicals and pool supplies, Lombardo said.

"It potentially could have been disastrous," Lombardo told the mayor. The Fire Department spent about \$21,000 on overtime battling the blaze.