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National

Arson suspected as 8 die in Vegas Hilton blaze

United Press International
LAS VEGAS, Nev. — The second deadly fire to strike a crowded Nevada gambling resort in less than three months blazed Tuesday night through the Las Vegas Hilton, largest hotel in the United States, killing at least eight persons and injuring about 300.

Police suspected arson and questioned four people, but no charges were filed and all were released.

"At this time we think someone other than the persons questioned started the fire," a police spokesman said. "We have no leads on other suspects. We have deter-

mined that there is definitely evidence of arson."

Trapped guests screamed from broken windows, made makeshift escape ropes of torn sheets, scrambled for helicopters on the smoke-shrouded roof and plunged to their deaths from upper floors. Helicopters circled the smoke-shrouded roof. A spokesman for Valley Hospital said its helicopter ambulance took off 20 people and the fire department airlifted firefighters to the roof.

The 30-story hotel — second largest in the world after the Rostisa in Moscow — is only about two miles from the MGM Grand Hotel, where 84 people died in a blaze Nov. 21. The Hilton blaze was a nighttime sequel to the MGM fire, which broke out during the day.

"You couldn't help but think of the MGM fire," said singer Andy Williams, appearing at the Hilton with dancer Juliet Prowse, who was getting dressed for his show when he was told to leave the building.

"I'm glad it was handled so well."

"It's a shame. It's not good for

Las Vegas to have two fires so close together."

Ed Knowels, a Toledo bank executive staying at the hotel, said "no fire alarms" were activated during the fire.

Fire Chief Roy Parrish called the fire "suspicious," saying three separate fires had erupted. Parrish said the main fire broke out near an elevator lobby on the eighth floor and smaller fires broke out later on second and third floors.

By daybreak, Clark County Fire department had identified all but one of the 8 victims.

"There may be as many as 10," said Deputy Fire Chief John Pappageorge. "But I stress maybe because sometimes you get double counts."

The hundreds of guests forced to flee, leaving their belongings behind, were put up at other Las Vegas resorts. Hilton officials said they would be allowed to return to their rooms later in the day to retrieve their luggage.

Hospitals reported treating 242 patients — 29 of whom were firefighters, and more than 100 of whom were admitted overnight.



Staff Photo by Chuck Chapman

Valentine rush

Cindy Heller, an employee of University Flowers, demonstrates her flower-arranging skills as Valentine's Day nears. Heller said orders are pouring in. She suggested ordering early to insure getting flowers.

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