



New Zealand Fire Service

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Stephen Mills
Counsel Assisting
Canterbury Earthquakes Royal Commission
PO Box 14053
Christchurch Airport
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Dear Mr Mills

CTV Building Fire

I refer to your recent discussions with the Legal Counsel for the New Zealand Fire Service about the cause of the fire at the CTV building and about whether the Fire Service had any records of hazardous substances in the CTV building.

Cause of the fire

Operations by the New Zealand Fire Service at the CTV building following the 22 February earthquake were focused on the rescue and recovery phases, and our firefighting was part of that effort. To carry out an investigation at that time would have put New Zealand Fire Service fire investigators at unacceptable risk.

The fire resulted from catastrophic building collapse. This collapse and the later de-layering of the building prevented any likelihood of gathering useful evidence about where and how the fire started, as fire investigations rely heavily on a static fire scene. In addition, there is not a statutory requirement for the New Zealand Fire Service to carry out a fire investigation into all fires. As a result, the New Zealand Fire Service did not carry out a fire investigation.

Due to the deep seated nature of the fire, we would not be able to draw any useful conclusions about the origin and cause of the fire from a review of information from witnesses, or a review of photographs and video of the fire.

A review of international literature on fire following earthquakes would not provide us with any useful basis for drawing conclusions about the origin and cause of the fire, as aggregated statistical information cannot be applied to establish the cause of a particular fire.

Hazardous substances

The Fire Service holds no records about hazardous substances present at the CTV building.

However, following your query, a New Zealand Fire Service Fire Safety Officer made inquiries with the Christchurch City Council. The Council advised that its records indicated a 9kg LPG cylinder may have been used from time to time for a cabinet freezer in the building.

If a 9kg gas cylinder had been in use in the building it is possible that gas escaping as a result of earthquake damage could have been ignited by mechanical or electrical sparks.

Yours sincerely



Paul McGill
Chief Executive & National Commander (Acting)