

No Accelerant Signs at Synagogue Fire in Minnesota City

By The Associated Press

Sept. 9, 2019

DULUTH, Minn. — A preliminary investigation has found no signs of accelerants at a fire that destroyed a historic synagogue in northern Minnesota, authorities said Monday.

But further investigation will have to be done once the building is stabilized, Duluth Fire Chief Shawn Krizaj said.

Firefighters responded to the fire at the Adas Israel Congregation in downtown Duluth about 2 a.m. Monday. Firefighters were still hosing down the building's blackened shell five hours later.

All that is left among the charred remains are the remnants of some structural walls. The building "is pretty much a total loss," Duluth Assistant Fire Chief Brent Consie said.

Authorities said they have some idea where the fire began, Minnesota Public Radio News reported.

"Buildings typically do not start on fire for no reason," Duluth Police Chief Mike Tusken told reporters. "We have an idea, but we don't have enough facts right now for us to be absolutely sure what happened."

Police have spoken to a couple of people of interest in connection with the fire. But Tusken declined to say why they were of interest, other than that they were in the area.

Two investigators have been assigned from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, which is standard when fires break out in places of worship.

Authorities say eight of 14 Torah scrolls, the holy books of Judaism, stored in the synagogue were saved.

One firefighter who was struck by falling debris was taken to a hospital, treated and released.

Executive director Steve Hunegs of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas said his group was saddened by the synagogue's destruction and is monitoring the situation.

"We are in close communication with the leadership of Adas Israel Congregation and law enforcement in the Duluth area," Hunegs said in a statement. "The investigation into this incident is ongoing."

According to its website, the Adas Israel Congregation is an Orthodox/High Conservative Jewish congregation with a membership of 75 people.

Construction of the synagogue was completed in 1902.

This story has been corrected to show Duluth is in Minnesota, not Wisconsin.