

Blaze guts NP block's top floor

The top floor of a New Plymouth block of shops was demolished yesterday, 15 hours after fire swept through the building.

The fire began at 2.30 a.m. yesterday in an old wooden two-storeyed building on the corner of Devon St West and Egmont St, taking 50 firemen with extra firefighting equipment 75 minutes to get under control.

The top floor, which was unoccupied office space, was destroyed, leaving the building unsafe. Shops below also suffered major damage.

The chief building inspector for the New Plymouth City Council, Mr D. Adams, said the verandah had to be resecured by temporary shoring.

Later yesterday afternoon the top floor was demolished to make the building safe. However, most of the shops in the building had vacated the premises.

The owner of the building, Mr A. McBride, of Tamahere, near Hamilton, said the building is a complete write-off

and he is anticipating demolition to begin within a month.

Mr McBride had owned the building for only 18 months, and said he would not be able to afford to redevelop the area and would probably sell it. The extent of the damage is still being assessed.

New Plymouth's deputy fire chief, Mr A. Proctor, said the station had received an emergency call at 2.30 a.m. from men working in a nearby shop who saw the blaze.

At that stage two engines were sent but later the New Plymouth west crew were called, the emergency tender, the Hydraulic platform, and Oakura and Waitara appliances were called.

An Inglewood engine was taken to the New Plymouth station in case of other calls.

Shops in the building, which had leases until 1984, now face the task of finding new premises, causing major disruptions to what would have been their best selling

time near Christmas.

The only shop remaining in the block is the Third World Shop, which backs on to Ariki St. The manager of the shop, Mr H. Duynhoven, said no damage was caused to the shop, but it no longer has power, water or a telephone.

The shop has been situated there for five years and Mr Duynhoven expressed his concern over having to shift.

"We are non-profit-making and Christmas time can make or break us. I am scared volunteers who work in the shop may drift if we close for a while," he said.

Mr Duynhoven said he was looking for new premises, but would continue to stay where they were until the building is due to be demolished.

This is the second fire in the building in three weeks. On October 31 a fire began at the rear of the International Beauty Salon, but was confined to the one shop.

Further fire pictures on page 23.



At the height of the fire in an old wooden block on Egmont St, New Plymouth, firemen had to battle to stop flames spreading to adjoining buildings.

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