

U.S. experts search for cause of Paraguay blaze

An official says an ignited gas leak likely caused the fire that killed 426 people

DEBORA REY
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

ASUNCION, Paraguay — A forensic team that included U.S. experts examined the charred interior of a Paraguayan supermarket Wednesday to determine the cause of a weekend blaze that killed more than 400 people,

many of whom were trapped inside by locked doors.

As the specialists took burn samples from the building, Interior Minister Orlando Fiorott said the investigation "clearly points" to an accidental gas leak that ignited. He said that it didn't look as if Sunday's blaze had been intentionally set, but cautioned that the findings were preliminary.

The death toll was revised to 426 on Wednesday, down from 464 a day earlier; 520 people remained hospitalized with burns and other injuries.

The attorney general's office said 153 were reported missing.

Officials charged a co-owner of the supermarket and four others with manslaughter Tuesday after a security guard said he was ordered to lock the doors to prevent people from stealing.

Officials have said they were checking reports that an exploding gas canister could have started the flames, which forced a floor to collapse, crushing cars and burning many bodies beyond recognition.

President Nicanor Duarte has

called for a swift and thorough investigation into the tragedy at the Ycua Bolanos supermarket.

Meanwhile, Paraguayans continued to mourn their dead.

Outside a nightclub near the supermarket that became a makeshift morgue, school-age children held a vigil and lit candles to remember the victims.

"One of my best friends was killed in the fire and I miss her terribly," said 12-year-old Ana Benitez. "She sat next to me in class and it's going to be painful when school resumes and I

see that empty chair next to me."

Paraguayan officials said they've begun reviewing leading shopping centers in the capital and their emergency preparations.

Angel Villalba, the president of the Paraguayan Association of Supermarkets, told a radio station that initial findings have been alarming.

"Almost none of them have emergency exits," he said.

Deborah Rey is a writer for the Associated Press.

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DETOUR

continued from page 1

Jeannine McIntyre, senior Spanish and education major, said the construction is pointless.

"I don't see the purpose of doing that part of the road," she said, complaining about the lack of explanation from the University.

McIntyre said she has to cut through Friendly Hall to get to class in Lawrence Hall.

"It's a minor annoyance," she said. Ramey doesn't feel that the construction is too much of a problem.

"I walked through the construction two times today," he said.

Taking the narrow path that goes by the EMU post office might be annoying for some, but the handicapped have to take a special route to get where they need to go.

Stamm said there are disabled access routes open and available, with signs posted, directing handicapped individuals.

In the case of an emergency that may require vehicles to get around the construction, Ramey said the vehicles could just drive over the fence, if necessary.

Stamm said depending on where the emergency vehicles needed to go, they could "work around it."

He said if they needed to go down East 13th Avenue, the vehicles could go by Johnson Hall or down East 18th Avenue and University Street.

Stamm said he expects construction to be finished by September 15.

"(The 'Heart of Campus') is taking a key intersection and making it a very inviting area that will be something we can all be proud of," he said.

omiedrawhorn@dailyemerald.com

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CAMPUS CONSTRUCTION

Tim Bobosky Freelance Photographer

'Heart of Campus' construction crew member Larry Moser cuts rebar Tuesday afternoon to allow for removal of large blocks of concrete and the buried rails of a trolley line that once ran through campus.

Builders unearth remnants of historic trolley system

During 'Heart of Campus' construction Monday at the corner of University Street and East 13th Avenue, construction crews unearthed two steel rails that were once part of Eugene's trolley system.

The Eugene and College Hill Street Railway was built by H.W. Holden and began operation in 1891.

The original route ran along East 13th Avenue and over the hill south of campus on University Street. A branch was built later that ran from College Hill to West 19th Avenue. At its height, the trolley system covered just over three miles.

The first trolley car was pulled by mules and driven by a man named Wiley Griffon. In 1907, the Eugene City Council granted a franchise to the Willamette Valley Company to convert the system to an electric trolley.

In 1927, with the automobile becoming cheaper and more prevalent, the Eugene trolley system closed down, and was replaced by the bus system that is still used today.

— Ben Brown