



# FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT

Catherine Place, Henderson, Auckland



## Incident Information:

F3237517

Suspicious Fire

8:17 p.m. 6 May 2021

## Report completed by:

Nick Linton, Specialist Fire Investigator  
Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Te Hiku

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## Author's brief

My full name is Nicholas Mark Linton. I am a Specialist Fire Investigator for Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Fire and Emergency).

I have served with the New Zealand Fire Service, now Fire and Emergency, since 2011. I am responsible for determining the origin and cause of fires.

I have completed the following training courses:

Fire Investigation 1 in October of 2017.

Fire Investigation 2 in May of 2018.

I have attained the following qualifications by examination:

Graduate of the Institute of Fire Engineers (GIFireE) in the following papers:

- Fire Engineering Science
- Fire Safety
- Aviation Firefighting
- Human Resources

I have completed the following modules through The International Association of Arson Investigators (CFI Training Modules):

- Introduction to Evidence
- Physical Evidence
- Fatal Fires

I have the following memberships:

Membership of the Institution of Fire Engineers (Graduate).

I sit on the Auckland Council of the New Zealand Branch of the Institute of Fire Engineers and organize several CPD events throughout the calendar year. I am also a Branch Councillor on the New Zealand Branch of the Institute of Fire Engineers with the following assigned portfolios:

- CPD events and seminars within the wider Auckland region
- Exploring how the IFE can become more diverse, particularly with disabilities

I have the following additional experience:

7 years' front line firefighting experience.

Fluent in New Zealand Sign Language and a demonstrated history of working with people with disabilities in a fire safety setting.

I was appointed as a Fire and Emergency Inspector under Section 166 of the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017 in May of 2018.

As a Specialist Fire Investigator for Fire and Emergency I am required to respond to significant fires in accordance with Operational Instructions with the principal objectives being to co-ordinate, supervise or undertake investigations into major and serious fires, including fatal fires, by determining the point of origin of a fire and from this establishing the cause of a fire.

I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses, Schedule 4 of the High Court Rules 2016, and agree to abide with them.

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## Executive summary

This report relates to a fire on 6 May 2021 at 8:17 p.m. in a supermarket aisle of the Countdown Henderson Supermarket, Catherine Place, Henderson, Auckland.

Three fire appliances from Henderson and Te Atatu Fire Stations were dispatched to the incident. The incident was escalated to a '3<sup>rd</sup> alarm' level.

Multiple firefighting delivery hoses were used to extinguish the fire, in addition to a security guard using an internal hose reel and the approximately 17 sprinkler heads that operated.

Video footage obtained by the Police showed two persons walking in aisle number six immediately prior to the fire occurring. One person approached the aisle shelving and held what appeared to be an ignition source to one of the sections of the shelf. Shortly afterwards, flames were seen coming from the shelf.

The area of origin was aisle number six (6). The point of origin was the second section into the aisle, and the third shelf down from the top.

The cause of this fire is believed to be the deliberate ignition of combustibles via an introduced ignition source, such as a match or a lighter.

Although I could not find the remains of such an ignition source, it is most likely that this was either added and then removed or burnt by the resulting fire. In my opinion, this fire could not have started without human involvement.

The classification of this fire has been listed as incendiary.

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## Terms of reference

### Sponsor

██████████ – Area Manager, Waitemata.

### Incident background

The Officer in Charge (OIC) of this incident considered the circumstances of the fire met the criteria requiring the attendance of a Specialist Fire Investigator (SFI) as per National Commander's Instruction P3. The OIC made this request through the Fire and Emergency Communications Centre who summoned the author of this report to attend the incident as a SFI.

The reason for the attendance of a SFI was: Suspicious Fire.

### Objectives

Determine the origin and cause of the fire through best practice analysis and investigative processes.

### Scope

- Focus on this incident specifically, but consider historical data and information from this site and other similar incidents, and other incident information that may have a bearing or contributed to the outcome.
- Analysis of the circumstances and factors, including the occupant(s) actions, building fire loading and design, fire protection/suppression systems performance, circumstances of the fire, and result of the fire.
- Where evidence or suspicion of a deliberate fire start is discovered, the matter is to be referred to the Police who will then have the responsibility for further investigation. The Police may request that the Fire and Emergency SFI assist with the origin and cause determination.
- Produce a completed report for the report sponsor outlining all relevant findings.

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## **Description and use of building**

This was a commercial building used as a mall complex. The area of the building involved in fire was Countdown Henderson Supermarket, inside the mall itself.

The complex had an operational sprinkler system which subsequently activated once the heat level was sufficient to activate the sprinkler heads.

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## **Pre-incident events**

I am not aware of any incidents in the lead up to this fire.

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## Discovery of fire

The fire was discovered by a member of the public who subsequently called 111. Approximately 17 sprinkler heads activated as a result of the fire. In addition to this, security guards at the complex used an internal hose reel in an attempt to contain the fire. This was instrumental in containing the fire along with firefighting deliveries from Fire and Emergency New Zealand.

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## Fire and Emergency New Zealand response

Information sourced from Fire and Emergency Computer Aided Despatch Incident Report.

<b>Incident Number</b>	F3237517		
<b>Call Type</b>	STRU		
<b>Method call received</b>	111 Telephone		
<b>Incident date</b>	6 May 2021		
<b>Incident time</b>	8:17:22 p.m.		
<b>1st Arrival</b>	HEND657	8:21:03 p.m.	
<b>2nd Arrival</b>	HEND651	8:25:33 p.m.	

On 6 May 2021 at 8:17 p.m. a Fire and Emergency Communications Centre received a 111 call to a fire in the supermarket aisle of Countdown Henderson at Catherine Place, Henderson, Auckland.

Three fire appliances from Henderson and Te Atatu Fire Stations were dispatched to the incident. Henderson 657 arrived in attendance first. Shortly after their arrival, Henderson 657 transmitted a priority message requesting a '2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm' attendance. This indicated to the Communications Centre and to further responding appliances that there was a confirmed fire at the address. The incident escalated to a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm level.

Multiple firefighting delivery hoses were used to extinguish the fire.

A SFI was dispatched as the incident met the National Commander's Instructions, P3: Fire Investigation and Reporting.

I arrived at the scene on 6 May 2021 at 9:12 p.m. Due to the suspicious nature of the fire, the Police were present at the scene. We agreed to meet back at the scene in the light of day to conduct a full scene examination. The Police provided scene guards overnight. I arrived back at the scene on 7 May 2021 at 8:12 a.m.

## Process of investigation

### Interviews

I interviewed the crew of the first responding fire appliance and the information provided informs this report.

I interviewed the Police at the scene and the information provided informs this report.

I interviewed the staff of Countdown Henderson Supermarket who were present at the time of the fire and the information provided informs this report.

### Scene Examination



Image 1: The layout of the supermarket. Schematic courtesy of the New Zealand Police.



*Photo 1: The main entrance to the Countdown Henderson Supermarket.*

A scene examination commenced at the main entrance to Countdown Henderson Supermarket in West City mall. There were nil signs of smoke, heat or structural damage to the entrance.



*Photo 2: One of the fire extinguishers found inside the entrance to Countdown Henderson Supermarket.*



*Photo 3: A second fire extinguisher that was found inside the entrance to Countdown Henderson Supermarket.*



*Photo 4: A third fire extinguisher that was found inside the entrance to Countdown Henderson Supermarket.*



*Photo 5: A fourth fire extinguisher that was found inside the entrance to Countdown Henderson Supermarket.*

Inside the entrance to Countdown Henderson Supermarket several fire extinguishers were discovered out of their housings indicating that they may have been used in an attempt to control the fire.



Photo 6: Aisle number 1 looking towards the fruit, vegetable, deli and bakery departments.



Photo 7: Aisle number 2.



Photo 8: Aisle number 3.



Photo 9: Aisle number 4.





Photo 10: Aisle number 8.

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Photo 11: Aisle number 9.



Photo 12: Aisle number 10.



Photo 13: Aisle number 11.

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Photo 14: Aisle number 12.



Photo 15: Aisle number 13.



Photo 16: Aisle number 14.

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Photo 17: The rear of the supermarket looking towards the dairy and meat departments.



Photo 18: The rear of the supermarket looking towards the seafood department.



*Photo 19: The front of the supermarket looking towards the checkouts on the left of the photo.*

Aisles 5, 6 and 7 were the only aisles that showed signs of smoke and heat damage. All other aisles showed only water damage from a combination of the activation of the sprinkler system and firefighting delivery hoses. See photos 6 through 19 for the aisles showing only water damage.



Photo 20: Aisle number 5 showing minor smoke and heat damage.



Photo 21: Aisle number 7. The fire travel from aisle number 6 into aisle number 7 through the back of the shelf is shown by the white arrow.

Aisle number 5 and aisle number 7 showed minor signs of smoke and heat damage. Fire patterns in aisle



number 7 indicated that the fire had travelled from aisle number 6 into aisle number 7 through the back of the shelf.



*Photo 22: The section of the shelves that had the most damage in comparison to the other shelves.*



*Photo 23: The section of the shelving units where the fire originated from. The shelf that the fire started on is shown by the white circle.*

Aisle number 6 showed signs of severe smoke and heat damage to the right-hand side of the aisle when looking from the entrance. Video footage obtained by the Police showed two persons walking in this aisle

immediately prior to the fire occurring. One person approached the aisle shelving and held what appeared to be an ignition source to one of the sections of the shelf. Shortly afterwards, flames were seen coming from the shelf. The burn patterns to this shelf support what can be seen on the footage obtained by the Police.

I could not find any electrical items near the area where this fire started. I could not find any oily rags that could have led to spontaneous combustion near the area where the fire started.

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## **Area and point of origin**

### **Area of Origin**

The area of origin was aisle number six (6).

### **Point of Origin**

The point of origin was the second section into the aisle, and the third shelf down from the top.

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## Conclusions

### Supposed Cause

Based on the evidence available at the time of this investigation, the classification of this incident has been recorded as Incendiary.

The cause of this fire is believed to be the deliberate ignition of combustibles via an introduced ignition source (such as a match or a lighter). Although I could not find the remains of such an ignition source, it is most likely that this was either added and then removed or burnt by the resulting fire.

In my opinion, this fire could not have started without human involvement.

### Elimination of Other Possible Causes

There were no electrical sources near the point of origin.

I could not find the remains of any oily rags that could have led to spontaneous combustion near the point of origin.

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## Report approvals

Investigation and report completed by:

### Investigator

Name: Nick Linton

Job Title: Specialist Fire Investigator

Date: 13 May 2021 02:25p.m.

I confirm the truth and accuracy of this statement. I make the statement with the knowledge that it is to be used in court proceedings. I am aware that it is an offence to make a statement that is known by me to be false or intended by me to mislead.

**A technical review of this report has been completed by:**

Name: [REDACTED]

Job Title: Senior Specialist Fire Investigator

Date: 16 June 2021 09:14a.m.

**This report has been approved by:**

Name: [REDACTED]

Job Title: Area Manager, Waitemata

Date: 16 June 2021 11:16a.m.

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## **Appendix 1: Witness Details**

Removed in compliance with the Privacy Act 1993 and the Official Information Act 1982

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