



Case Study –

Emergency disaster work completed at recent Oconto High School fire, smoke and soot disaster

By Malcolm Stone

The students at Oconto High School returned to classes on May 12 after a fire broke out on Wednesday, April 16. The fire and smoke forced the building to be evacuated and classes canceled. More than 300 students and 42 teachers and staff members relocated to the local Oconto Middle School. They were displaced for just over three weeks. During the restoration project, thousands of man-hours were spent cleaning and repairing the site. Although most of the damage occurred in a small area, the school had to be restored, repaired, cleaned, painted and sanitized due to smoke and soot damage which permeated the entire 1960's-era structure located at 1717 Superior Avenue.

The Oconto Unified School District and its insurance team contacted crews from Milwaukee –based Paul Davis National and Paul Davis Restoration and Remodeling of Southeast Wisconsin and work was permitted to be performed onsite quickly with clean-up and stabilization efforts beginning shortly after the fire. Emergency services teams started the large-scale work to clean the building and its contents with great cooperation from school administrators, teachers and students. Crews worked around the clock with nearly 300 individuals during the day and 140 at night.

The most significant work was the cleaning of the surfaces above the ceiling tile, and especially the duct work. According to J. Murphy, senior vice president of operations for Paul Davis National, the initial cause of damage was thick, toxic black smoke from the burning of the recycled plastic bathroom partitions. The smoke spread throughout the building via the ventilation system. All of the bathroom partitions are now replaced with metal ones.

Dr. Sara Croney, Oconto Unified School District's Superintendent, said the school is back to normal and has passed all environmental and safety standards by industrial hygienists and inspectors. She shared accolades about the Paul Davis team and appreciated the well-coordinated work and outstanding communications among all involved.

“This project is amazing. I am impressed,” said Dr. Croney. “Paul Davis did a great job and I could not have been more confident and pleased with their work, professionalism, and caring nature,” she said. “I had great peace of mind while working with the entire team and we are all very grateful that our school has been put back together better than ever.”

Initially, Paul Davis sent numerous 53-foot tractor trailers to the school to support hundreds of crew members with highly-advanced drying and restoration equipment. During the job, all procedures were completed at the customer's direction and approvals were reviewed by the school officials and insurance carriers. All parties worked together to secure the project, develop the scope of work, execute the plan, document the progress, and calculate costs. The process remained fluid and flexible to meet predetermined deadlines.

Paul Davis painstakingly cleaned up smoke and soot from virtually every space in the school along with sanitizing and cleaning contents while emptying each student locker with items bagged, tagged, and identified. Hard and soft goods were packed up, cleaned and laundered at Paul Davis' contents facility in

Milwaukee. Paul Davis workers covered all student lockers in plastic and utilized special hydroxyl generators to eliminate fire and smoke odors. Items were replaced in the lockers for students when they returned to school. Paul Davis also worked with teachers and labeled materials in the classrooms to be saved or discarded. Crews photographed rooms and contents, so that items could be placed back in the exact spaces after cleaning.

Murphy and his team attributed the lighter and improved appearance of the interior areas of the school to the replacement of dingy ceiling tiles, thoroughly cleaned and repainted walls, and floors with a new vinyl base and five coats of wax. "Everything is clean and bright," said Murphy. The boys restroom in the north hallway, where the fire started, is totally new."

Paul Davis National's senior project managers, Neal Lengacher and Winston Bean, were responsible for overseeing day and night crews during the entire process. Lengacher summarized the 24/7, three week job as a tremendous success with sincere thanks to all involved, especially the Oconto students, teachers and staff who worked together to get back into the newly-restored high school during the daytime and after hours.

Like many of Paul Davis' large losses, the Oconto High School project was a highly organized emergency response effort with closely followed protocol. "Large losses can be unpredictable. Response strategy must be managed with well-planned and immediate action. We have a significant advantage with the extensive experience in large losses associated with the public school sector and other industries," said Murphy.

"Our primary objective is to operate all loss sites efficiently by establishing in writing, the proposed tactics and techniques in advance of implementation. Documentation must be delivered in an accurate and timely manner to ensure efficient cost containment," he said. "Customer service is not an option. It is built in to the very heart of every Paul Davis job." Ultimately, the fire resulted in an estimated \$5 million in smoke damage. For more information contact J. Murphy at (281) 358-4077 or email jmurphy@pdnational.com. Visit the website at www.pdnational.com.

###

About Paul Davis National: Paul Davis National specializes in large loss and is a member of the Paul Davis Restoration organization. Paul Davis is a franchise system made up of over 320 full service general contractors providing site stabilization, emergency water mitigation, fire restoration, mold remediation, document restoration, contents cleaning, and remodeling services. Paul Davis National owns numerous tractor trailers and support equipment that are deployed throughout the U.S. to support their national clients as well as their fellow franchisees in the case of a major disaster. The company is headquartered at 2010 S. 4th Street in Milwaukee, Wis. Visit the website at www.pdnational.com.

About Paul Davis Restoration & Remodeling of Southeast Wisconsin: Paul Davis Restoration & Remodeling of Southeast Wisconsin was established more than 20 years ago and is located at 2000 South 4th Street in Milwaukee. The Paul Davis office in Fox Valley is located at 1320 Gillingham Road in Neenah. The company has served the region with numerous community service initiatives since the 1990s. The local company is a franchise office of Paul Davis Restoration Inc., a leader in residential and commercial loss mitigation, reconstruction, and restoration services nationwide. For more information, call 414.383.3131. Visit the website at pdwisconsin.com. For more information about Paul Davis Restoration Inc., call 904.737.2779. Visit the website at www.pdwisconsin.com.

Malcolm Stone: Malcolm Stone is the Director of Marketing and Communications for Paul Davis Restoration Inc. He has more than 15 years experience in corporate marketing. Stone may be reached at 904.737.2779 or email mstone@pauldavis.com.