

## Fire guts homeless center's warehouse



The contents in the Verde Valley Homeless Coalition warehouse were destroyed during an early morning fire Sunday, Jan. 27, 2022. (Verde Independent/Vyto Starinkas)

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COTTONWOOD – The Verde Valley Homeless Coalition warehouse was scorched and the contents were destroyed during an early morning fire Sunday, Jan. 27, as 19 homeless people were sleeping next door in the overnight shelter.

No one was injured, according to a mission official.

The department responded to the homeless coalition facility at 4:30 a.m. and fire crews found smoke and fire showing, explained Cottonwood Fire Chief Ron Sauntman.

“Crews provided an aggressive interior fire attack to achieve fire control,” Sauntman said. There were no life-safety concerns, he added.



The crews had to perform an extensive overhaul of the facility while “monitoring for structural compromise of the all-metal structure,” the chief said.

The investigation remains active at this time..

Verde Valley Homeless Coalition Executive Director Rhonda Bishop said the fire destroyed clothing, bedding, paper and plastic products, bleach, laundry soap, sanitizer, food, and other donations that were stored there. They had to rip through the wall with a backhoe, she added.

“But no people or pets or anything were damaged, so we’re fortunate for that,” Bishop said. “Thank goodness no one was in here.”

The warehouse is across the parking lot from the VVHC shelter, which recently added a full-time overnight shelter to its permanent day-use facility.

She said 19 homeless people were sleeping at the shelter at the time of the fire, she said. They were able to safely exit in the morning with the one staff member.

It won’t affect the overnight shelter operations, but it may affect how frequently people can have food, she said.

Bishop asked that people do not drop off anything for the shelter at this time, but call first. There is no place to store things right now.

People can call 928-641-4298 to find out the best way to help.

The daytime shelter will continue to be open from 1 to 5 p.m. every day and the overnight shelter will be open at 6 p.m. every evening, she said.

Agencies that responded to the fire in addition to Cottonwood Fire were the Cottonwood Police, the Verde Valley Fire District and Verde Valley Ambulance Association.

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