



FIRE AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN TEXARKANA, TEXAS

Case Study

Incident

The morning of March 8th was a typical Sunday morning as worshipers gathered at the First Baptist Church in Texarkana, Texas. Just hours later, the church faced an unforeseen fate. Shortly after 3 p.m., a fire started in a control room sound booth on the second floor, spreading to the main broadcast area as well as three offices. Smoke and soot spread throughout the church's ventilation system, affecting nearly every area in the facility including electronic equipment.

The church, which has approximately 3,000 congregants and streams services worldwide to over 182 countries, lost access to their audio/video production equipment, abruptly halting their ability to broadcast services.

Servpro, a facility restoration company, was hired to dry, clean and mitigate further building damage. Servpro immediately engaged AREPA to decontaminate sound equipment, allowing the church to resume services from a new temporary location the following Sunday.



Challenges & Logistics

The second floor broadcast area and three adjacent offices were rendered unsalvageable. The classrooms and sanctuary were heavily contaminated with smoke and soot, and the remaining offices and atrium areas on the first floor, which were intuitively thought to have been safe from exposure, were lightly contaminated due to the ventilation ductwork air circulation.

The main sanctuary required a complete demolition. The work offices required a controlled demolition, meaning that explosive materials were placed in a pre-determined and timed sequence, to ensure strategic collapse of those designated areas.

Following the initial emergency activities, which took AREPA six days to complete, AREPA was asked to concentrate on equipment that would ultimately be stored off-

“Because of how quickly they worked, how thorough they were, their communication between what we need and what they were able to do, we were confident that when that Sunday came, we’d be ready to go with our Church service.”

– Jay Budzilowski, Director of TV and Media at First Baptist Church on AREPA's emergency work order

site, until the church reconstruction was complete.

A comprehensive inventory was generated to account for all the equipment on site. Due to ongoing demolition work and the sizeable number of contractors engaged in the recovery, safely negotiating around recovery personnel and relocating the equipment to the off-site staging area, proved to be challenging.

The fire occurred during the first few weeks of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, when most states imposed “shelter-in-place” restrictions. Normal travel arrangements became anything but normal. Stringent safety guidelines were implemented. Daily temperature readings, respirators, adequate workspace between specialists and continuous sterilization were implemented.



▲ AREPA's workstations set up to adhere to social distancing guidelines



▲ A dry transformer before and after decontamination



▲ AREPA specialists engineering a dedicated hydroxyl chamber for decontaminated equipment



▲ A circuit board before and after decontamination



Outcome

By engaging AREPA early on an emergency work order, the church was able to host services the following Sunday from its temporary location.

AREPA inventoried 600 items that consisted of audio/video equipment, stage lighting, office equipment, and musical instruments among others. Of the 600 items, 550 were decontaminated in approximately one month. The rest of the items were deemed unsalvageable and required replacement. AREPA's decontamination efforts saved the church approximately \$500K as compared to wholesale replacement.

Rebuilding the church is estimated to take one year from the date of loss.

“ All the staff for AREPA has been very open and honest with everything and I appreciate them plainly speaking to some of the problems that our equipment had. Its helped lower our anxiety level tremendously because we rely on a lot of equipment – especially our technological staff, our media staff, our office workers who need their PC's. We've been able to move forward and get people back to work again, that might have been out for quite a while had the equipment not been serviced in such a fashion. ”

– Jay Budzilowski, Director of TV and Media at First Baptist Church on AREPA's staff