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## Quick response critical for restoration contractor

Cooper Construction brings more than a half-century's experience to cleaning up damaged buildings

BY DAN CARTER

*Daily Journal of Commerce*

Although they know they will be busy, crews at Cooper Construction Co. often don't know where they will be working next. In fact, the principals of the firm sometimes don't know either. It's because the Portland general contractor has been responding to emergency calls for help for structural damage from fire, smoke or water since its founding in 1950.

"Often a call at three in the morning determines our next project and we have to respond immediately," said Cooper Vice President Rod Ramsour. "We are always ready to work 24/7/365 to meet our clients' needs."

In early May, the company responded to a call from the Scappoose School District. A heat lamp for a classroom science project at Otto Petersen Elementary School had shorted out and started a fire. Two classrooms were heavily damaged and four more had



Dan Carter/DJC

A fire started by a science project heat lamp on May 9 damaged six classrooms at Otto Petersen Elementary School in Scappoose. Three months of work by Cooper Construction Co., specialists in fire, water and smoke restoration, brought the classrooms and the 50 year-old structure back to better shape than before the fire.

extensive smoke damage.

Cooper Construction Superintendent Mel Reber quickly put his 34 years of experience with the company to use.

"The first thing that we do when we

start a restoration project like Petersen is to secure the building to keep people out," he said. "We board up doors and

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windows and cover any holes in the roof made by the fire fighters. Next, we start carrying out all the damaged contents and building materials before doing the necessary structural demolition. We will clean, itemize and store the contents until it is ready to be moved back in. Finally, we are ready to call in our subcontractors so that construction and restoration can begin.”

“Because of the nature of our work, our employees have a wide range of talent, expertise and experience,” Ramsour said. “We have carpenters, painters and cleaning and restoration technicians. Several of our employees, like Mel, have been with us for more than 30 years. Many have been here more than 15 or 20 years.”

While the Cooper employees have special skills to restore damaged structures, the company also has in its arsenal specialized equipment to assist in the work.

To remove smoke and air-borne debris from a building, air scrubbers – fans with special filters – are used early on. Also, the company employs wall drying systems that drill into wet walls and dry them out from the

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inside. Portable ozone machines and an ozone chamber at the company’s headquarters are very effective at removing the smoke smell from upholstery, curtains, clothing, books or paper. Thermo fogging machines are placed in attic spaces to force odor killing deodorant into the tightest nooks and crannies. Finally, stain and odor blocking primers, paints, sealants and encapsulants are used.

When projects like the Petersen school are complete, the structure is often in much better condition than when the damage occurred.

“Because of newer building codes that are in effect, things like seismic upgrades, ADA upgrades and more advanced mechanical and electrical systems are part of the restoration,” Reber said. “The client really benefits. The structure is safer and sounder.”

Tom Weaver from the Scappoose School District Maintenance Department, who worked closely with Reber and the Cooper team, agrees that the district now has a better facility.

“Although it is a tough way to go about it, the upgrades have made these classrooms and this building a better structure,” he said. “Also, Cooper Construction has been excellent to work with. The professional crew has been very responsive to our needs.”

According to Ramsour, responsiveness is one of the musts for a company like Cooper.

“We are currently working on a very large fire damage project at a school in North Plains,” he said. “In our first week there, we spent \$800,000 in clean-up, demolition and initial construction costs. We immediately had 30 air scrubbers in the building so that the undamaged portions of the school could be put back to use as soon as possible.

“It is that kind of response and the work of our highly skilled employees that, I believe, is the secret to successfully serving our clients for the past 55 years.”