

New Hampshire State Fire Marshal's Office

33 Hazen Drive · Concord, NH 03305 · 603-271-3294 · Fax: 603-271-3206

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Max Schultz, District Chief
Christopher T. Wyman, Investigator

Jaffrey, NH – State Fire Marshal J. William Degnan and Chief David Chamberlain of the Jaffrey Fire Department announced today that the investigation into the fire at New England Wood Pellet, LLC has been completed and has been ruled “accidental”.

The fire was first reported to the Jaffrey Fire Department at 9:20 PM after they received a fire alarm activation from the facility and a follow up 911 call from employees reporting a fire in the building. Jaffrey Fire fighters arrived at the scene within seven minutes of receiving the fire alarm and called a total of three alarms bringing fire companies from Peterborough, Rindge, Winchendon, MA, Dublin, New Ipswich, Troy, Harrisville, Fitzwilliam, Keene, Hancock, Meadow County, Temple, Lyndeborough, Antrim, Greenville, Wilton, Hillsborough, Milford and Greenfield to the scene over the course of the twenty-nine (29) hour fire suppression effort.

The investigation concluded that the fire originated just below the motor that powered Pellet Mill 3, which is one of three machines that create the wood pellets. What ignited the fire remains under investigation. On duty employees discovered the fire and immediately fought the fire using a portable fire extinguisher. During the employees effort to fight the fire, the fire extended into the conveyor system that takes finished wood pellets throughout the manufacturing process. Both Chief Chamberlain and State Fire Marshal J. William Degnan stated that the actions of the on duty employees were appropriate and should be applauded for their efforts. Chief Chamberlain stated that the employees were completely unaware that fire had spread to the manufacturing process and immediately called 911 once they were aware the fire had spread. Chief Chamberlain stated that Jaffrey Fire Department has worked jointly with New England Wood Pellet to train company employees relative to the use of portable fire extinguishers.

The fire inside the manufacturing building, which houses the pellet making process, was extinguished quickly by fire fighters, limiting damage to both the building and the manufacturing process equipment. Fire fighters then focused their suppression efforts on the fires that had extended into silo's 4 and 5 located directly behind the manufacturing building. Chief Chamberlain stated that fighting the fire in the silo's was a slow process because the safety of all personnel involved was the first priority. Chief Chamberlain stated that fire fighters worked jointly with the staff of New England Wood Pellet and Nick Cricenti, a Licensed Fire Protection Engineer contracted by New England Wood Pellet.

Chief Chamberlain stated that “fighting a fire in a silo is much different than fighting a normal building fire”. Silo fires are unique because you are dealing typically with a large structure used solely for storage of a material and contains confined spaces and has very limited access. Silo 5 contained approximately 80 tons of finished pellet fuel, while Silo 4 contained approximately 50 to 60 tons of refined dry saw dust. Chief Chamberlain stated that “working together with New England Wood Pellet employees was essential to ensuring that the fire was safely extinguished and that structural damage to each silo was limited so that the fire fighting effort was successful.

Steven J. Walker, President / CEO of New England Wood Pellet, LLC stated that the all twenty two employees of the Jaffrey facility have been working around the clock since the fire to both clean the facility and return the plant to operation. Mr. Walker stated that it is the companies hope to be back in full operation by the end of next week.

Three fire fighters received minor injuries during the twenty-nine (29) hour fire suppression effort.

Two fire fighters sustained heat related injuries and one sustained an arm injury, all were treated at a local medical facility, but immediately released.