

MARKET FIRE RUINS 300 STALLS IN CENTRAL VIETNAM



Around 300 booths in a market in the central province of Quang Ngai were destroyed in a blaze that lasted over eight hours early Tuesday, local authorities said.

Vendors try to search for whatever is left of their goods and belongings in the charred remnants of Chau O Market in Quang Ngai Province.

The fire broke out at about 11:30 p.m. on Monday, destroying almost half of the one hectare **Chau O Market** in Binh Son District. Goods lost included groceries, garments, fabrics and gold. Quang Ngai police mobilized seven fire engines and 40 firefighters and called an extra two fire engines from nearby Quang Nam Province's fire brigade. The firefighters had the blaze under control by 2 a.m. Tuesday but could not extinguish it until 8 a.m.

Sai Gon Giai Phong newspaper quoted local authorities who estimated there was VND150 billion (US\$8.9 million) in damages. Lu Thanh Phuoc, deputy head of the market management board, said the fire started in Ho Thi Hoi's incense shop and spread rapidly to other stalls. Initial investigations showed an electric short circuit may have ignited the fire, Quang Ngai police said.

Ngo Thi Sam, who owns two grocery stores, two cosmetics shops and three gold stalls, said she and her relatives tried to rescue some of her stock before the fire spread, but they couldn't get much.

"The heat was so fierce," said Sam, "I lost about VND1 billion (\$59,300)." Sam's husband searched for more gold taels amid the charred remnants of the stall Tuesday morning after the fire was out.

Mai Thi Thao, whose home is about 500 meters from the market, said her family rushed to the shop as soon as they heard about the fire. "When we got there, the flame was still a long way from my store," she said. But we could take only some goods. It was fortunate that I could save my accounting books." While vendors living near the market could save some property, others could only watch their fortunes go up in the smoke when they got there too late.

Pham Phuong, chairman of Binh Son District People's Committee, said the committee would make a temporary market at a local stadium to help vendors run their business. Chau O Market, which was built in 1983, was run down due to lack of repair, Phuong said. While the market's firefighting system was poor, there was also no access for fire engines to enter the market, he added.

Reported by Hien Cu