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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arrests Made in School Arson Cases

On September 22, 2009, at approximately 9:40 pm, Palo Alto Police and Fire Units responded to a report of a burning recycling bin at Hoover Elementary School located at 445 E. Charleston Road. This was the third such intentional fire incident within the past week. Responding police units established a perimeter while the Fire Department quickly extinguished the fire, preventing significant damage.

An alert and observant Palo Alto Unified School District custodian called 911 and provided responding units with a description and direction of travel of three possible suspects. The custodian observed three subjects running away from the area where the burning bin was located.

A short time later, Palo Alto Police officers located and detained three subjects matching the descriptions. The custodian positively identified all three juvenile suspects. The suspects were arrested and subsequently interviewed by a police detective. The investigation revealed that the suspects were responsible for the Hoover fire as well as four prior school related fires. The suspects are identified as a 15 year old male, a 17 year old male, and a 17 year old female. The juveniles were later released to their respective parents.

The school custodian later explained that he was well aware of the on-going arson activity occurring on Palo Alto School property. Investigators learned that this custodian actually moved the burning can away from school walls before calling the police. The custodian's heroic action may have prevented a much greater loss.

Coincidentally, Palo Alto Police in conjunction with Palo Alto Fire and the Palo Alto Unified School District recently implemented an arson suppression plan. This plan was enacted in response to numerous school related arsons that have occurred on Palo Alto school property since January of this year. Since the implementation of this plan, police saw a halt in arson activity between early July and late August. This was a result of a related arrest, increased community awareness, and prevention measures enacted by the school district and fire department.

Palo Alto Police, Fire, and the School District will continue a joint effort to protect our schools and to encourage arson awareness. Palo Alto employees and citizens are encouraged to report suspicious activity on school campuses. Without a community effort, successful investigations are less possible.

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