

Sprinkler saves 30 lives



Fire threatens first floor of bar accommodation

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A SPRINKLER system saved 30 people from dying when fire broke out at an historic New Plymouth hotel early yesterday.

Thirty guests sleeping at New Plymouth's Breakers Bar and Cafe accommodation had an unexpected early morning call following a fire in this first floor common room early yesterday. Photo: BRADLEY AMBROSE

When firefighters arrived at 5.45am yesterday, smoke and flames were pouring from a first floor window in the Breakers Cafe and Bar.

About 30 guests were asleep at the time, many of them in the city for the Jack Johnson concert, while others were live-in staff.

The all-wooden building, formerly the State Hotel, is one of the oldest in Devon St.

"I immediately thought the Braemar," Senior Station Officer Sam Bennett said yesterday.

The Braemar, another of the city's historic wooden hotels, was lost to fire earlier this year.

No one was in the building at the time.

But, unlike the Braemar, the

Breakers' sprinklers had activated and contained the fire, the alarm bells were ringing and the evacuation procedure was well under way, Mr Bennett said.

"These sprinklers are wonderful things. It certainly saved their bacon," Mr Bennett said.

As a result of the sprinklers, the fire damage was minimal.

There was a short period where three people were unaccounted for but they were later found to be safe after getting out through one of the many exits.

"Everything went well. We've lost a couple of buildings in other areas of the country recently so it's good to have a save," Mr Bennett said.

The fire is believed to have started in a small common room where cigarette butts had set fire to the curtains after

people had gone to bed following an after-concert get together. Firefighters spent about 2½ hours at the hotel.

A relieved Breaker's general manager Nick Webb-Shephard said last night the guests were all checked out yesterday and found to be fine after their early morning emergency wake-up call.

"It was done very well. The systems and procedures all worked. It could have been a major."

A commercial cleaning firm had completed most of the clean-up by last night, he said.

And it was business as usual at the bar and cafe last night with the Tom Jones version of Burning Down the House getting a hammering on the sound system.