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## Del Rey School Fire

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Firefighter entering the portable Photo Jim Boucher

classrooms similar to the one at Del Rey to detect and rectify any other problems.

While fatalities from school fires are rare, just over half of school fires occur between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., hours when students and staff are most likely to be at school, according to data from the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), a part of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

"Schools are relatively low risk from a life safety perspective," states Fire Marshall Mentink. When schools are occupied, everyone is awake, adult supervision is present, there are exits to the outside nearby, and evacuation drills are routinely conducted, he explains. "All schools in the OUSD conduct fire drills on a monthly basis," says Bucci, and he adds that these drills include all classrooms, portables, and other occupied areas like administrative offices.

While the majority of school fires occur outdoors on school property, structure fires account for approximately 42% of all school fires, according to USFA data. The leading cause of school structure fires is incendiary/suspicious activity, which includes arson fires, and accounts for 37% of all school structure fires and 52% of middle and high school structure fires. There has not been a significant arson-related fire at a school in the MOFD service area, notes Mentink.

Schools are governed by strict inspection and fire/life safety codes that require sprinkler and other fire/smoke alarm systems, so school structure fires are usually contained quickly and are generally less damaging than fires in other types of nonresidential buildings. The fire at Del Rey School was under control in about 15 minutes. The damage was confined to the portable, which sustained an estimated \$18,000 in damage and \$2,000 in content loss.

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The suspected cause of the fire in a portable classroom at the Del Rey Elementary School in Orinda was determined to be an electrical problem associated with the heating and cooling system, according to Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Fire Marshall Mike Mentink. No students or teaching staff were on the school campus in the early morning hours the day before Thanksgiving, when firefighters from the MOFD were alerted to a problem at the site through the school's fire alarm system.

"Everyone is relieved that it occurred during a time when the classroom and school was not occupied," states Jerry Bucci, Director of Business Services for the Orinda Union School District (OUSD).

"The firefighters, school custodian, and OUSD maintenance staff who arrived first, quickly controlled the situation to prevent any additional damage," he adds.

The portable building at Del Rey, one of 15 portable classroom buildings the District has at various school sites, had been leased from a portable classroom supplier. According to Bucci, the lease company has accepted responsibility for the costs related to the fire, and the damaged portable will be replaced with a new portable building this week. In addition, the lease company's technicians and the OUSD maintenance department have inspected other portable