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Demolition of fire-damaged building begins

By: CRAIG TENBROECK - Staff Writer

VISTA ---- Workers began picking apart a fire-charred and mold-infested building adjacent to City Hall on Monday, carting debris from crumbling offices with wheelbarrows.

The two-story building at 630 Alta Vista Drive has been cordoned off since a blaze in mid-December blackened the walls and caused the tile roof to collapse. Officials have said the probable cause of the fire was electrical.

San Diego-based Har-Bro construction is handling the demolition and rebuilding effort, which could take up to a year and cost in excess of \$2 million, said senior project manager Sean Scott.

About a dozen workers, most wearing dust masks, shoveled soggy piles of decomposing acoustical tiles and lugged out charred debris from the building at about 8 a.m. Monday.

"You just can't move around in here," Scott said from the second floor, which will be demolished before the reconstruction process begins. "It's a mess."

Russell Jellig, who has worked out of the Alta Vista Professional Building for 27 years, said former occupants ---- including attorneys, a dentist and a psychologist ---- were notified about two weeks ago that demolition was imminent. The 15-unit building is owned by eight people, including Jellig, who is president of the building owners association.

On Monday morning, it appeared that most offices had been emptied of salvageable items, though several wilted plants still lined the downstairs courtyard where a fountain was brimming with stagnant water and crumbled tile. A blackened statue of Lady Justice was in the upstairs hallway.

Demolition is expected to take about two weeks, Scott said.

The fate of the first floor of the building is still uncertain, he said. The blaze, which started in the attic, did little harm structurally to those offices, but water damage and three months of exposure to the elements created another problem: clusters of black mold that coat the once-white walls.

"It is extremely unhealthy to be breathing that," Scott said.

San Diego contractor Alliance Environmental will attack the mold using a process called ThermaPureHeat. The building will be wrapped in plastic, then "we inject it with superheated air and essentially make it like a convection oven," said Tim Tilley, vice president of Alliance's San Diego office.

After four to five hours of exposure to 170 degree air, the mold, bacteria and insects that have taken root in the walls should die, Tilley said.



*Carlos Estrada shovels debris into a wheelbarrow as he and other workers start work on the demolition of the Alta Vista Professional Building in Vista on Monday.*

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*Ramon Gomez picks up debris Monday as he and other workers start the demolition of the Alta Vista Professional Building, which was significantly damaged by fire in December. The building will be reconstructed just as it was before, officials said. Photo Hayne Palmour IV Gabriel Galindo pulls apart a wall Monday at the Alta Vista Professional Building, which was significantly damaged by fire in December. Carlos Estrada shovels debris into a wheelbarrow as he and other workers start work on the demolition of the Alta Vista Professional Building in Vista on Monday.*

After that, "the first floor is going to be skinned down to the studs," Scott said, and workers will determine whether to save the frame or tear it down.

Once the building has been rebuilt "it'll be exactly the way it was," Scott said, matching the surrounding buildings in size and architectural design.

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