



LAKELAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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UPDATE: No Charges To Be Filed on 3 Children Involved in Playground Fire at Westside Park

Lakeland, FL – Lakeland Fire Department (LFD) Fire Investigators have concluded their investigation of the fire set on May 11, 2016 that led to the destruction of nearly \$300,000 worth of equipment at Westside Park (see original media release below for further details). One playground area approximately 25 feet from the site of the destructive fire does still remain and is available for use.

Investigators tracked down the suspects, three boys between the ages of 8 and 12. The fire was started by the boys who gathered pine straw, that is readily available at the park, underneath the playground equipment and lit the pine straw with a lighter. When the fire burned out of control, the boys attempted to put the fire out with dirt and urine. That proved to be unsuccessful so they fled the scene.

The events that took place and the equipment damaged do not meet the state of Florida's definition of *Arson*. The investigation by LFD Investigators was to see if there was "willful or malicious" intent which would allow for *Criminal Mischief* (806.13) charges.

Investigators found no evidence of "willful and malicious" intent as defined by the statutes. The evidence was presented to the Florida State Attorney's Office who has concluded that no criminal charges will be filed due to lack of intent.

The Florida State Attorney's Office, Bartow location, can be reached at (863) 534-4800.

Original Release from Wednesday, May 11, 2016:

On Monday, May 9, 2016 at approximately 5:16 PM, calls were received for a fire at Lakeland's Westside Park located at 1800 Oakhill Street, Lakeland, FL 33815. Upon arrival, firefighters encountered fully involved playground equipment.

The fire was contained to the playground equipment. The fire was under control within approximately half an hour to forty-five minutes after arrival and Lakeland Fire Department Fire Investigators were called to the scene to investigate.

The fire was contained to the playground equipment and there was no personal property loss or injury to any individuals.

LFD Investigators have ruled the fire suspicious and the cause remains under investigation. If anyone has any information of any suspicious activity at the park's playground on the date of the event, information can be shared with Fire Investigators at 863-834-8201.

For information in regards to the park equipment, park, or other questions better suited for the City of Lakeland's Parks and Recreation Department, please contact Kevin Cook, Director of Communications at 863-834-6264.

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