

# How a COVID cleaning backpack caught fire, changed Lafayette Parish schools' storage rules

[www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/education/how-a-covid-cleaning-backpack-caught-fire-changed-lafayette-parish-schools-storage-rules/article\\_3e84b384-919f-11eb-b6ba-5f19efc0feba.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/education/how-a-covid-cleaning-backpack-caught-fire-changed-lafayette-parish-schools-storage-rules/article_3e84b384-919f-11eb-b6ba-5f19efc0feba.html)

BY KATIE GAGLIANO | Staff writer, Katie Gagliano

March 31, 2021



The Lafayette Parish School System has made changes to how staff handle electrostatic backpack sprayers for COVID-19 cleaning after a backpack's lithium batteries caught fire while charging at Carencro High School in January and caused \$330,000 worth of damage.

Carencro Fire Chief David Mouton said units responded to the Jan. 6 fire at 3:04 a.m. and firefighters walked the outside of the school building until light smoke was found emitting from the boys' gym roof. Firefighters entered through an unlocked door, then forced open four interior doors in the administrative side of the boys' gym until the fire was located in an office, he said.

Mouton said the fire was contained because of the office's cinder block walls and steel door. Once located, the fire took about five minutes to extinguish with the help of Lafayette Fire Department firefighters, he said.

Lafayette Fire Investigator Elliott Roger determined the fire was an accident and originated from an electrostatic backpack sprayer that was charging in a coach's office overnight. A custodian interviewed said he plugged in the backpack when he left the school around 9

p.m. Jan. 5 after using it to sanitize the gym. Electrical malfunctions of the power strip and charging cord were ruled out.

“The cause of the fire was overcharging of the lithium batteries causing them to overheat and ignite,” Roger’s report said.

LPSS spokesperson Allison Dickerson said the district made safety changes to backpack sprayer use as a precautionary measure after the fire, including storing the backpacks in metal containers with appropriate air circulation and not charging the devices overnight.

Dickerson said the school system did not file an insurance claim over the fire because the damages did not meet their insurance policy’s retention threshold.

Kyle Bordelon, LPSS director of planning and facilities, said in an email that the \$330,000 approved by the Lafayette Parish School Board on March 3 covered fire restoration clean up, replacement of damaged ceilings and equipment, flooring replacement, replacement of damaged athletic equipment and painting. Direct fire damage was limited to the coach’s office, though the boys and girls’ gyms both suffered smoke and soot damage, he wrote.

The gyms were out of commission for about three and a half weeks while repairs were made, Dickerson said.

All areas impacted by the fire have been restored to their original condition and “the building looks like it did before the fire,” Bordelon said.