

# New Violations Found at Richmond Auto Yard That Went Up In Flames



The Dec. 16 blaze took place at Deal Auto Wrecking, a salvage yard located at Gertrude Avenue and Richmond Parkway. (*Contra Costa Fire PIO/Twitter*)

By **Ted Goldberg** FEBRUARY 10, 2017

Contra Costa County health inspectors have discovered a new round of serious hazardous waste violations at the Richmond-area auto-wrecking yard where some 200 vehicles burned in a [large fire](#) in December.

Meanwhile, investigators say the fire that prompted a shelter-in-place order for local residents and schools and sent a huge column of smoke into the East Bay skies was so damaging that they are unable to determine the cause of the blaze.

“The fire was so big and so hot that it pretty much destroyed all the normal evidence,” said Robert Marshall, fire marshal with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. “When you have that level of

burning, it's very difficult to tell exactly what started the fire," he said in an interview.

The Dec. 16 blaze took place at Deal Auto Wrecking, a salvage yard located at Gertrude Avenue and Richmond Parkway. Investigators determined that the blaze broke out in a pile of cars on the northeast side of the yard.

"The only thing essentially left in that area is steel. Anything that was aluminum melted. Anything that was lead melted," Marshall said. "All we had was piles of metal underneath the cars where the metal had melted and pooled. Even the steel that survived was very deformed."

In the months before the blaze, county fire and health officials discovered a series of violations for rules governing oil spills, employee training and soil contamination. Officials say those problems were resolved.

But last week county health officials discovered more problems.

A health and hazardous materials inspector at the site found an open hazardous waste container under a car crusher, according to Randy Sawyer, Contra Costa's chief health and hazardous materials officer.

Sawyer said the inspector found that containers used to hold gasoline drained from cars were in poor condition. The inspector also found problems with how the company handles oil filters from vehicles.

Deal Auto Wrecking was given 30 days to correct the violations. A follow-up inspection is planned next month.

In the days after the fire, Contra Costa County Supervisor [John Gioia said he wanted to find a way to close the yard.](#)

The fire is under investigation, according to Bay Area Air Quality Management District spokesman Ralph Borrmann.

Efforts to reach Deal Auto Wrecking and the owner of the land that burned in the fire have been unsuccessful.