



Iron Mountain Fire Intentional 'to Destroy Evidence'

by Indy Staff, 09 March 2015.



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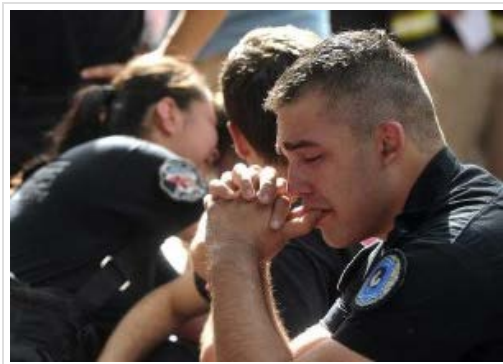


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The head of the Financial Information Unit (UIF), José Sbatella, has said that he strongly believes that last year's fire in an Iron Mountain warehouse in Barracas neighbourhood was a "plot" to destroy evidence of tax evasion.

Iron Mountain is an information management services company, storing records and overseeing the destruction of documents for thousands of corporations around the world.

Eight firefighters and two members of security forces were killed when one of the warehouse's walls collapsed during the fire last February. Sbatella branded their deaths "homicide".



Firefighter at the scene (photo: Daniel Dabove/Télam/Iz)

Last week, the forensics team of the federal police investigation concluded that the fire, which took place on 5th February 2014, was the result of an "act of arson". Marcela Sánchez, the lead prosecutor investigating the incident, said: "It has been determined that the fire had various sources and that combustible substances were used to start it."

This morning, Sbatella said: "We believe there was a plot between Iron Mountain and clients to suppress evidence." He went on to list a number of big banks "involved in money-laundering operations" – including HSBC and BNP Paribas – which stored documents in the warehouse.

Sbatella explained that when the UIF asked for documents in the [tax evasion investigation against HSBC](#), the bank "claimed everything was burnt in the fire".

Suspicious about the fire first arose last year when it was revealed that of the 43 corporations that stored documents in the ill-fated warehouse, many were involved in 29 active investigations by the Economic Crime and Laundering Unit (Procelac) at the time of the fire.

Nor was it the first time the corporation's facilities have burnt down. Fires have occurred on five previous occasions at deposits in North America and Europe, at least two of which are suspected to have been caused by arson. Last year's fire was, however, the first time that such an incident had caused deaths.

Further doubts were raised days after the fire, when Edgardo Castro, an inspector at the Buenos Aires Labour Sub-secretariat, revealed that he closed down the Iron Mountain warehouse in 2008. "I requested for that place to be closed down because basically it had deficiencies in its fire protection system. There was too much flammable material, the hoses didn't work, there were no sprinklers, and there were obstacles in the hallways," he said.

Though his request was granted and the warehouse was temporarily closed down, he was later removed from the case. The investigation subsequently revealed that the fire caused such extensive damage due to the very issues he had highlighted.

As a result of the revelations, many have since accused both Iron Mountain's clients and the City Government of being complicit in the fire.

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