By Mike McNamee

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Cause of Tang fire
still not understood

By Mike McNamee

Investigation of the July 22 fire in Tang Hall has failed to
discover the cause of the blaze

which fatally injured an MIT
graduate student from Sao Paulo,
Brazil.

An MIT report prepared by the
Office of the Vice President for
Operations also failed to pin

down the how the fire started.

"We haven't been able to
determine the cause of that fire,

despite all our tests, the tests
done by the fire marshals and

those done by Factories, Material's

(MIT's insurey) laboratories,

Special Assistant to the Vice

President for Operations Richard

Sorenson told 'The Tech.'

"We simply don't know how we got

the fire of that intensity in that
corridor that morning."

The 20-page MIT report,

which Sorenson compiled from
evidence submitted by the

Physical Plant, Medical Department,

Campus Patrol, Safety Office,

Housing and Dining Service,

and other MIT departments,

has been sent to Bernick, Smith,

Donald and Fakley, the Institu-
tion's law firm, for review.

Herrick, Smith will send the

report to another area firm

which Sorenson told 'The Tech.'

"We simply don't know how we got

the fire of that intensity in that
corridor that morning."

The fire, which raged in Tang and in the Physical

Plant Control Center at 11:44am

July 22, started in a pile of

cardboard boxes left near a trash

chute in the 19th-floor corridor

of the building, according to

the report. Analysis of the

remains of the boxes showed

they contained some paper and

other trash. "stuff that might have

come from cleaning out an

apartment," Sorenson said. "But

there was nothing that might have

set the fire off."

The Tang House Manager "Scotty"

Thompson, and Physical Plant

mechanic "Manny" Soaps suf-
f ered slight burns and smoke

inhalation when they went to the

19th floor to investigate.

Both were treated at Massa-

chusetts General Hospital.

Ribeiro was found, clad only

in pajama bottoms, on the

floor in front of the elevator by

firefighters arriving at about 11:45.

Contrary to earlier reports,

Sorenson said, his death six days

later was caused solely by

external burns and respiratory

damage from inhaling heat.

There was no evidence of in-

cluding toxic gases, Sorenson said.

"We can only speculate, but we

believe Ribeiro was asleep when

the alarm went off, and he

wandered into the corridor sort of
dirrty and disoriented," Sorensen said.

"He then apparently was

locked out of his room and trapped in the corridor. In the high-intensity heat, he was

burned very quickly and very
dreadfully."

Tests of the materials in the

corridor showed that "everything

in that corridor was within

tolerable ranges of fire specifi-
cations," Sorenson said. Earlier
test results that the vinyl wall

covering used in the corridor had

spread the fire were disproved,

he said, when identical wall

covering used in one of the labs

did not cause the fire to spread.

Tang was mounted and tested in the fire. Minor fires

did occur in the lab, but fire was

"flash" or blown out of controls.

"The building performed very

well in containing the fire and

the smoke," Sorenson said.

"When the firemen arrived they

were ready to go out by itself. This wasn't a spreading fire that was threat-

ening the whole building."

Two months of investigation by MIT has failed to turn up the cause of the Tang Hall corridor fire going between classes, injuring a baying infant, killing a graduate student and injuring three persons.

What's inside Senior House?

(See photo essay page 4-5)

GUES T H ome?

MIT Alumni Association

Photo essay page 4-5