

Blaze in migrant squat near Barcelona kills at least two

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Police officers investigate the site of a blaze at an abandoned warehouse in a suburb of Barcelona. (Photo: Reuters)

Barcelona, December 10 (RHC)-- Flames ripped through an abandoned warehouse occupied by scores of immigrant squatters in a Barcelona suburb, killing at least two people and injuring more than 19 overnight. The fire, which sent a huge cloud of smoke into the air, was under control by Thursday morning, but authorities said parts of the building had collapsed and there was a risk the whole structure

could fall, complicating rescue efforts.

Undocumented immigrants often slept in the warehouse in the large industrial suburb of Badalona, Catalonia region's acting president Pere Aragonés and other officials said. "It was a squat which we had for years known could end in tragedy," Badalona Mayor Xavier García Albiol told journalists at the site.

Many people who were sleeping inside when the fire broke out late on Wednesday managed to escape, Aragonés told broadcaster TVE. "We don't know exactly how many people there were at the time of the fire," Aragonés added. "We still need to see if there could be someone who remained trapped inside."

The building had housed as many as 180 people in the past, a Catalan interior department spokesman said.

Emergency services treated 19 people, including three in a critical state and four others seriously injured, officials said. Miquel Samper, in charge of interior affairs in the regional Catalan government, said the origin of the fire was not known yet.

Badalona is a large coastal Barcelona suburb with a population of about 220,000, making it the fourth largest city in the Catalonia region.

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