

Melbourne Market Targeted in Four Overnight Fires

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Vendors at Melbourne's Queen Victoria Market were left shocked after a series of fires were deliberately set at food stalls in the city's central business district late Friday night.

Victoria Police were called to reports of four small fires near the Peel Street end of the market at approximately 11:10 p.m. A 38-year-old man, who allegedly threatened a member

of the public with a blowtorch-style lighter while they tried to extinguish one of the flames, has been charged. No injuries were reported during the incident.

CCTV footage released by 7News shows the man calmly igniting several stalls by holding a lighter to their covers. In one clip, a bystander is seen using a fire extinguisher to put out a blaze.

Before emergency services arrived, one fire destroyed a commercial juicer valued at \$20,000. The machine's owner, Sev Ali, described it as "the heart of the business," explaining that operations cannot continue without it.

Another stallholder, Nash Bideci, said the incident caused significant losses. "You get up at 4 a.m. to make a living and then come to work, and this happens. It's shocking," he said. Bideci added that thousands of dollars of fresh produce had to be discarded as it was no longer sellable.

Police confirmed that none of the market stalls were open at the time of the fires. Officers are working with market security to contact stall owners regarding the damage.

The 38-year-old man, who reportedly has no fixed address, has been charged with criminal damage by fire and unlawful assault. He was remanded to appear at Melbourne Magistrates' Court on Saturday.

Market vendors expressed disbelief at the attack, with Ali stating, "Absolutely no idea why anyone would do that to a small business." Police continue to investigate the incident to determine any further details or motives.

Queen Victoria Market, one of Melbourne's most iconic and visited landmarks, hosts hundreds of small businesses and food vendors, attracting thousands of locals and tourists daily. Authorities emphasized the importance of public safety and thanked bystanders who helped extinguish the fires before they could spread further.

The investigation remains ongoing, and police urged anyone with additional information or footage of the event to come forward.