

## The Summit Transmissions Fire Lessons learned from a shop owners' worst nightmare.

Wednesday August 17, I arrived home around 9:40 p.m. when I received a phone call from my employee Jorge. Fire trucks were at my shop and I needed to get there right away!!! For any business owner this is one of the worst nightmares anyone can have. As we drove back to work, both Sandy and I remained calm and focused. We needed to take care of business.

When we pulled into the parking lot, I got my first real view of the damage. Five of my six roll up doors had been sliced open. My front door lock had been cut with a power saw that took its anger out on the door frame as well as the lock. The only lights were from flashlights and the fire trucks on the scene. Staring at me from the bay, closest to the office was the charred remains of a Honda Odyssey. It had come in for an intermittent transmission problem, and it was late in the day before we experienced it. I called the customer to let him know that we were keeping it overnight. The windows were rolled up and the ignition key was removed and left on the center console.

Walking through the front office, water soaked my shoes as I stepped over broken glass. Grabbing my flashlight, I went out to the shop, and the Honda was completely burned up inside, like one of those scenes from an action drama where a vehicle is torched. Only the metal of the seat frames remained inside the burnt up shell. Up high on the lift that was in front of the Honda, a Lincoln Continental was damaged by the heat. The bumper was drooping down and the tail lights were melted. Broken glass was everywhere. For a moment, I just stared at my cut up doors, now with openings large enough to get a truck through. It was around 11:30 p.m. when I told my wife Sandy that this was going to be a long night. We called SD glass and they were able to put wood on the roll up doors and a new lock on the front door, then we left for home around 3:30 a.m.

The next morning, we were able to see the full extent of damage. The fire disintegrated the Honda, did extensive damage to the Lincoln, and damaged a Ford Explorer and Dodge truck on the next bay. The other vehicles in the shop had thick layers of soot, including a beautiful 57 Chevy Wagon and 67 El Camino. The fire department cut off all of the power to our shop and the neighbors shop. We had to get a La Mesa City permit to restore it. When we finally got power restored on the 19th, I was able to view the surveillance video. The fire started at 8:33 p.m., after we were closed. The fire department arrived at around 8:52, so I am thankful for whoever called in the report and the quick response from the La Mesa fire department.

One of the first calls I received the next morning was from Glen Davis, who is a long time ASCCA member and past president of ASCCA. He told me he was sending me a check to help me out, and that ASCCA was working on a disaster relief fund to help us get through. Tracy Renee took time to set up the disaster fund, which has been a real lifeline for us. We are in awe about how generous people have been and so very grateful.

There are a number of lessons to be learned from what happened. Here is a small list to consider:

1. Install security cameras inside and outside. I was able to watch exactly what happened and saw the fire inside start, and what the fire department did on the outside. Also, if you do get a system, make sure it will connect to your cell phone for viewing.
2. Call your insurance agent and go over your policy. Make sure you have good coverage. Loss of income, and employee pay are important. Does your insurance cover you if your next door

neighbor has a fire and damages your place? Or what if your fire spreads to his place? Is there coverage? Thank you Jack Crawley for that idea.

3. Check your lease. Find out what your insurance covers and what the building owner insurance covers.
4. We started a new policy last month. Make sure all the windows are rolled up and the keys are either left on the seat or in the door. The windows rolled up prevented the cars from getting soot inside and it also controlled the Honda fire to a certain extent, till the widows blew out. It also keeps batteries from draining.
5. Research glass and door companies that have 24-hour emergency help. Check their reviews and pick the one you will call if something happens.
6. Create a disaster list. What to do if something happens. Fire, water, electrical or gas line break, what are the procedures to handle an emergency?
7. Put money aside for a disaster. You may need to make some emergency purchases.
8. Develop and maintain great relationships with fellow shop owners, vendors, suppliers and others. When something happens, they will be there for you.
9. Be appreciative. As bad as things might be, be thankful for what you have and how things might have gone. My building did not suffer structural damage. I'm getting great support. I will be back in business very soon.
10. Make lemonade out of lemons. Look for opportunities. I am taking time to fix some things around the shop that I never had time for. I'm asking my employees for ideas on how things work best for them. We are tossing away things we no longer need or were damaged. Our place will be cleaner, freshly painted, and better organized.
11. Support ASCCA and they will support you. I am truly amazed and humbled by the outpouring of support and help I am getting from fellow members throughout California.

There is still more work to be done, but my goal is to have the shop partially finished by September 6<sup>th</sup> and be fully operational by the end of the month. This has been a real challenge for both my wife and I, but our faith in God is strong and has sustained us through tough times before. I am truly grateful to everyone, especially those who have helped us financially. We are truly blessed to be part of ASCCA.

Thank you so very much!

Sincerely,

Jerry and Sandy Kubitsky  
Summit Transmissions.



