



Saint Paul Fire Department
645 Randolph Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102
(651) 224-7811

Investigation Report

Case

Case Details

SPFD211020045888	Blank, Joseph	Closed	N/A
Case Number	Lead Investigator	Status	Name
Confidential	Accidental	Electrical System	
Confidentiality	Disposition	Fire Cause	
10/20/2021	12:15		
Start Date	Start Time	End Date	End Time
Saint Paul Fire Department		Saint Paul Police Department	
Primary Fire Department	Secondary Fire Department	Law Enforcement	

Case Narrative

The fire department was called to the report of a fire in a detached garage. Firefighters arrived to find a small interior fire burning in a garage and quickly extinguished the fire. The occupant states that in the area of origin there were no batteries on chargers and the air conditioner was not being used. The owner does admit to occasionally smoking in the garage. There were numerous lightning strikes in the area at the time of the fire with a thunderstorm rolling through. Study of the area of origin showed a V-pattern of fire damage below the level of a duplex electrical outlet on the interior east wall near the service door. Firefighters stated that there were numerous ignitable paper items such as magazines in this immediate area prior to moving objects out of the way during fire suppression.

Case Background

Case Synopsis

Investigation Comments

Fire

Ignition Sequence

Electrical System	Vehicle storage area; garage, carport		
Fire Cause	Area of Origin	Equipment Power Source	Equipment Portability
Area of Origin Comments			
Electrical arcing		Fiberboard, particleboard, and hardboard	
Heat Source		Material Ignited	
Equipment Involved In Ignition	Equipment Make	Equipment Model	Equipment Serial Number

Fire and Smoke Spread Information

Confined to building of origin	
Fire Spread Material	Fire Spread Avenue
Smoke Spread Material	Smoke Spread Avenue
Fire Comments	

Weather

		23	ENE
Visibility	Relative Humidity (%)	Wind Speed (Mph)	Wind Direction
55.0	0.0	Yes	
Temperature (Fahrenheit)	Precipitation	Lightning	Information Obtained From Weather
Heavy thunderstorms			
Weather Comments			

Property Details (1 of 1)

Property

N/A			
Name			
1015 Churchill Street			
Address		Apt/Suite/Room	
Saint Paul	Ramsey County	Minnesota	55103
City	County	State	Postal Code
\$30,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$10,000.00	
Pre Fire Value	Content Loss Value	Structure Loss Value	
Property Description			

Area

Structure	Urban	
Area Type	Area Description	Area Quality

Structure

Parking garage, general vehicle				
Property Use		Structure Occupancy		
	No			
Alarm Type	Smoke Detector Present	Smoke Detector Performance		
None				
Sprinkler Standpipes		Sprinkler Standpipes Performance		
25		20	1	
Structure Length (Ft)	Structure Height (Ft)	Structure Width (Ft)	Number Of Stories	Number Of Units
Wood Frame	Type V	StructureMaterial_Wood		
Construction Type	Structure Type	Structure Material		
Slab	Wood	Pitched	Asphalt	
Foundation	Exterior Covering	Roof Type	Roof Material	

The interior study of the structure started on the south elevation. A large amount of personal belongings were stored along the interior surface of the overhead garage door. Entrance to the interior of the structure was made on the east elevation, through the service door.

Study of the interior showed increasing smoke and fire damage along the east wall. An electrical sub panel, on the north side of the doorframe showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and appeared in good condition. The main circuit breaker was found in the off position and it was learned that firefighters turned this circuit breaker off during fire suppression activities. A circuit breaker on the right side of the panel was not numbered but it was the third and last circuit breaker on that side of the panel. According to the index label this circuit breaker serviced the air conditioner which is in the area of greatest fire damage.

Approximately two feet to the north of the electrical sub panel, along the east wall was A "V"-shaped pattern. This pattern was in the area of greatest fire damage. The fire dynamics from around the "V"-shaped pattern indicated that the fire traveled upward along the east wall to the exposed roof beams and rafters of garage roof. The beams and rafters showed greater damage closest to the area of the "V"-shaped pattern below.

Potential fuel sources in this area included magazines, cardboard boxes and a wooden bed frame. Ignition sources in the area of the "V"-shaped pattern included a duplex outlet, a blue extension cord and an air conditioner plugged into the duplex outlet.

Study of the area of origin, around the "V"-shaped pattern revealed the following potential ignition sources: a duplex outlet, a blue extension cord, and a plugged in air conditioner window unit.

Study of the duplex outlet showed that the air conditioner unit was plugged in but not in the on position. There is no damage to the air conditioner plug prongs. The blue extension cord was reportedly found by firefighters on the floor but not plugged into the outlet. The blue extension cord also shows no signs of arcing or damage to the plug prongs and there is fire and heat damage to the face of the plug that was not protected during the fire.

Study of the duplex outlet showed fire damage to the interior of the plastic junction box and possible arcing and melting on the black wire connection that was not making good contact with the screw head of the outlet. Study of the black wire showed signs of melting closest to the screw head and possible metal on the surfaces around the screw terminal connection.

Interior Exam

Study of the south elevation shows that firefighters cut a large opening to the overhead door during fire suppression activities. The wood siding was removed above the garage door toward the peak of the roof by firefighters during firefighting. Smoke and fire damage is visible on the western peak of the roof. Study of the west and north elevations did not show any signs of smoke or fire damage. Study of the east elevation revealed minor smoke damage around the

upper portion of the service door frame. The service door was removed by firefighters during firefighting operations. An air conditioner was on the east wall to the north of the service door. The window type air conditioner showed signs of moderate smoke damage to the exterior of the unit. A weather proof exterior duplex outlet, to the mounted to the wall to the south of the service door revealed no signs of smoke or fire damage.

Exterior Exam

Alarm and Security Services

None

No

Sprinkler Standpipes

Smoke Detectors Present

Smoke Detector Locations

Fire Suppression

Closed And Unlocked

Closed And Locked

Doors

Windows

Other Entrances

Alarm Protection/Security Comments

Utilities

Electrical Status

Electrical Entrance

Fuel Status

Fuel Type

Fuel Company

Water Status

Water Company

Telephone Status

Utility Comments

Witness Statement (1 of 3)

Witness Statement

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

911 Caller [REDACTED]

Type

Employer

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Street 1

Street 2

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

City

State

PostalCode

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Q: How did you first become aware of the fire?

A: So I came outside and I smelled fire. And then I looked over to Rochelle's garage and there was smoke.

Q: Did you come out the backside of your house?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where was the smoke coming from?

A: It seemed it was coming from the upper part. And then I called 911. And right after I called 911, I pounded on Rochelle's side door.

Q: Was there anything else you noticed when you walked over; could you see where the fire was?

A: Right away I knew it was going on inside the garage.

Q: Did the doors appear to be closed at that time?

A: Yes.

Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement

Stariha	Rochelle	A
Last Name	First Name	Middle Name
Owner/Occupant		
Type	Employer	
Interviewed Date	Interviewed By	Interviewed By Other
1015 Churchill St		
Street 1	Street 2	
Saint Paul	Minnesota	55103
City	State	PostalCode
White	05/14/1968	
Race	Date of Birth	Driver's Liscense Number

Q: Do you know if your garage is insured?

A: I don't know, my mother sold it to me and I didn't change anything but my husband took care of that stuff and he passed away four years ago.

Q: Is your house insured?

A: Yes, State Farm.

Q: Were the doors to the garage closed and locked?

A: The side door was closed but unlocked because I had been going in and out of there getting stuff ready for my house.

Q: Was the overhead door locked?

A: Yeah.

Q: Any problems with the garage or electrical items in the garage?

A: The outside outlet by the garage door stopped working. I used to plug my electric mower into it but now was using extension cords to plug it in inside the garage by the sub panel. I ran over two extension cords and my daughter ran over a third 100 foot extension cord with my mower but I fixed them.

Q: Were there any lightning strikes in your neighborhood?

A: I heard thunder in the neighborhood.

Q: Was the air conditioner running at all?

A: No. It's heated too but that wasn't on either.

Q: Were any of the extension cords plugged in?

A: None of them were plugged in. I have a shorter blue one that I would plug in and run it to the door and then plug one of the 100 foot cords to that.

Q: Any other problems in the garage, mechanical or electrical?

A: None that I'm aware of.

Q: What was along the east wall of the garage interior by the duplex outlet?

A: I had a couple of bunkbeds, a crib.

Q: Any ignition sources like batteries on charge?

A: No, in fact we got some of the tools we were going to need, some old Ryobi's, and took them in the house. There are some still on a work bench in the back of the garage that I don't know how to use [referring to the north side of the garage].

Q: Any candles in the garage?

A: No.

Q: Does anyone smoke in the garage?

A: You know, I work in the garage; I'm a smoker, I'll admit that. I don't usually smoke while I'm working because it's kind of hard to move things and do things. I'm not going to say I've never smoked in there but I don't when I'm working.

Q: Do you dispose of cigarettes on the floor of the garage?

A: You know what? I had a friend that I let put some of his, he's an electrician, and I let him and he really pissed me off because he would.

Q: Like stamp them out on the floor? [referring to the cigarette butts]

A: Yes.

Q: How long ago had someone smoked in the garage?

A: I probably did it just to look at it or show my kids cause they came to help me yesterday to winterize it. But like I said, normally I don't smoke out there at all when I'm working.

Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (3 of 3)

Witness Statement

Captain Engine #22		
Last Name	First Name	Middle Name
Fire Department		
Type	Employer	
Interviewed Date	Interviewed By	Interviewed By Other
Street 1	Street 2	
Saint Paul	Minnesota	
City	State	PostalCode
Race	Date of Birth	Driver's Liscense Number

Q: What did you guys see?

A: So we get here and these two guys [referring to his firefighters] were in there first. It looked like there was a box of paperwork on fire and on further investigation it looked like an obvious V-pattern coming from an outlet. There's a sub panel in the garage and we shut off the main and there's also a circuit breaker tripped. We pulled a preconnect but didn't use it; a light water put it out.

Q: It was all buttoned up?

A: The door was shut but unlocked. [referring to the east service door] The fire appears to have snuffed itself out because the trusses are charred but when we got here it was a very small fire.

Witness Statement Comments

Conclusion

Case Conclusion

After examination of the fire scene, observation of fire patterns of both movement and intensity and interviews conducted, it is my opinion the fire began within the interior of the garage along the east wall at a duplex electrical outlet. The ignition source was probably an electrical arc either from a power surge from a lightning strike or from a high resistance electrical connection. The first fuel ignited was plastic and fiberboard. The oxidant was atmospheric air. The action that brought these items together was either due to a lightning strike from a passing thunderstorm or from a high resistance connection at the duplex outlet. The classification of fire cause is accidental. This concludes my investigation and report.

Signature

Blank, Joseph		
Lead Investigator	Signature	Date Submitted

Document Attachment List

Photo Log