



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

Investigation Report

Case

Case Details

SPFD210207005303	Blank, Joseph	Closed	N/A
Case Number	Lead Investigator	Status	Name
Confidential	Accidental	Smoking	
Confidentiality	Disposition	Fire Cause	
02/07/2021	22:46		
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 a report of house fire. Firefighters arrived and found heavy fire conditions between two dwellings that were approximately three feet apart. The occupant of Unit #1 states that he was in the front room of his Unit and smelled smoke. The occupant states that he investigated the source of the smoke and found increased smoke and embers coming from his bedroom that was located midway to the back of the house and to the east of the dining room. The occupant also admitted to smoking in the house and disposing of the cigarettes in numerous plastic bottles around the house. The heavily fire damaged bedroom had a window that faced the exposure dwelling that had a similar window facing this window. Investigation revealed heavy fire damage in the southwest corner of the bedroom and around a window that failed during the fire event that exposed 329 Lawson to heavy fire conditions. In the area of heaviest fire damage a plastic bottle of cigarettes was located and other possible ignition sources were eliminated due to their absence or their distance from this area of origin.

Case Background

Case Synopsis

Investigation Comments

Fire

Ignition Sequence

Smoking	Bedroom - < 5 persons; included are jail or prison		
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Fire Cause Area of Origin Equipment Power Source Equipment Portability

Area of Origin Comments

Cigarette	Fabric, fiber, cotton, blends, rayon, wool
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Heat Source Material Ignited

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Equipment Involved In Ignition Equipment Make Equipment Model Equipment Serial Number

Fire and Smoke Spread Information

Beyond building of origin	
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Fire Spread Material Fire Spread Avenue

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Smoke Spread Material Smoke Spread Avenue

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Fire Comments

Weather

		6	WNW
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Visibility Relative Humidity (%) Wind Speed (Mph) Wind Direction

-4.0		No	
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Temperature (Fahrenheit) Precipitation Lightning Information Obtained From Weather

Light Snowfall

Weather Comments

Property Details (1 of 2)

Property

N/A

Name

331 Lawson Avenue West

1

Address

Apt/Suite/Room

Saint Paul

Ramsey County

Minnesota

55117

City

County

State

Postal Code

\$42,100.00

\$10,000.00

\$55,000.00

Pre Fire Value

Content Loss Value

Structure Loss Value

Property Description

Area

Structure

Urban

Area Type

Area Description

Area Quality

Structure

1 or 2 family dwelling

Occupied

Property Use

Structure Occupancy

Yes

Not Operating

Alarm Type

Smoke Detector Present

Smoke Detector Performance

None

Sprinkler Standpipes

Sprinkler Standpipes Performance

42

20

2

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

Basement

Other

Pitched

Asphalt

Foundation

Exterior Covering

Roof Type

Roof Material

Investigation of the structure interior began on the south side of the building. Entering through the front door led to a small foyer. To the right of the foyer was an exterior style door that led to the first floor Unit #1.

Entering the first floor unit led into a front living room. This room suffered heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level to the floor level and no fire damage. There was a smoke detector mounted on the wall over a doorway that led to the north that suffered heat damage. It was later learned that this smoke detector did not sound during the fire event.

Inspection of a door on the north side of the living room that led to the dining room to the north showed signs of heavy smoke damage along the lock side of the door as well as a vector pattern of smoke damage along the upper hinge side of the door. Observation of the lower portion of the door revealed a horizontal pattern of smoke damage that extended from the top of the face of the door down to approximately the two foot level above the floor. These soot patterns on the door indicated that the door was closed during the fire event and then was opened upon the arrival of firefighters and secondary soot patterns were deposited.

Moving towards the north led to the dining room. Examination of the dining room revealed heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level down to approximately the three foot level above the floor and moderate smoke damage continuing to floor level.

There was evidence of fire damage across the ceiling of the dining room that created an area of clean burn on the ceiling. Observation of the east wall of the room revealed a doorway that was heavily fire damaged. Examination of the fire damage to the doorframe that led to a small bedroom to the east of the living room showed heavy fire damage that extended from the top of the doorframe to approximately the two foot level above the floor and moderate smoke damage that extended to approximately one foot above the floor level.

Traveling to the north from the living room led to the kitchen. Observation of the kitchen showed heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level that extended downward toward approximately three feet above the floor level and moderate smoke damage continuing to floor level. There was no fire damage observed in the kitchen. Inspection of the kitchen stove revealed that one of the knobs was missing from the left side of the stove top and a knob on the far right was found in the on and high position. Firefighters reported this burner being on during the fire event. During an interview with the occupant, he admitted to leaving the burner on to keep heat in the rear portion of the unit due to the cold temperatures and lack of heat provided from interior electric baseboard heaters. There was no fire damage observed coming from the stove, refrigerator or microwave oven and all appeared in good condition.

An exterior door on the west wall of the kitchen led to an enclosed porch. Observation of the door lock and doorframe showed that this door was in the closed but unlocked position during the fire event. The occupant of the lower unit stated that he escaped from this exit during the fire.

Moving toward the west into the enclosed porch revealed no signs of smoke or fire damage. An electric circuit panel

was mounted on the wall to the north of the doorframe to the kitchen. Examination of the electric panel revealed no signs of smoke or fire damage and the door to the panel was missing. The main panel switch was found in the on position and there was one breaker tripped in the #2 position. There was no index to identify what area of the electrical system that breaker #2 served.

Located in the enclosed porch, below the electric panel on the wall was a trap door that revealed stairs to the basement. Examination of the basement showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and two water heaters. Both water heaters appeared in good condition and neither showed signs of smoke or fire damage.

Moving to the second floor via a staircase that was just inside the front door that ran from south to north showed light smoke damage along the stairs.

On the second floor there was an exterior door. Inspection of the door and doorframe showed that the door was closed and locked during the fire event. Firefighters forced the door open and damaged the door jamb.

Examination of the second floor Unit #2 revealed moderate to light smoke damage and no fire damage. Observation of the kitchen showed no smoke or fire damage to the stove, refrigerator and both units appeared in good condition.

An electrical panel was located in this unit in the kitchen. Examination of the electric panel showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and no tripped circuit breakers. Firefighters turned this panel off at the main during fire suppression activities.

Firefighters opened several holes in the ceiling of this unit to check for fire extension into the attic space. Observation of the attic space showed some light fire damage closest to the eaves on the east side of the attic. There was also light to moderate smoke damage in the attic.

Returning to the first floor to Unit #1 I proceeded to the bedroom to the east of the living room that suffered the heaviest smoke and fire damage in the structure. Observation of the floor in the bedroom revealed a box spring and mattress were located on the south side of the bedroom. Inspection of the mattress and box spring revealed that almost all of the fabric was consumed during the fire event with the exception of a small amount of material that was left on the northwest corner of the mattress.

A dresser, that was located in the northeast corner of the bedroom, suffered heavier fire damage to the south side of the dresser as opposed to the north side, indicating that there was likely longer heat and fire exposure on the south side of the dresser.

Observation of the wood beams that ran across the ceiling suffered more damage on the south side of the bedroom as opposed to the north side or middle of the bedroom indicating a longer burning fire on this side of the room.

Investigation of wood trim pieces along the wall that were located underneath the drywall were completely consumed on the upper portions of the south side of the bedroom as opposed to the north side.

Investigation of the flooring in the southwest corner of the bedroom showed that the carpet had been completely consumed in this area of the bedroom. There was also the lowest area of burn found on the baseboards in this southwest corner of the bedroom. A wall outlet located along the west wall near this area of fire damage was examined and found to not show smoke or fire damage coming from within the outlet.

A partial vector pattern was visible along the west wall of the bedroom that indicated a heat source came from the southwest corner of the bedroom.

Located in the southwest corner of the bedroom in the area of origin was a partially melted clear plastic water bottle filled with cigarette butts.

Interior Exam

Examination of the south side of the structure revealed a small area of smoke and fire damage at the top of the wall at the peak of the roof. This damage extended into the soffit above. Firefighters removed some of the asbestos siding at the peak to check for fire extension.

Visible across the face of the dwelling on the south side was smoke staining from water run-off during fire suppression activities. All of the windows on this side of the dwelling showed signs of smoke staining.

A window on the front of the structure on the first floor was found broken. It was later learned from the occupant of Unit #1 that this window had been broken prior to the fire event.

Examination of the front door revealed that it was in the open position. Observation of the door showed that it was forced open and there was damage to the door lock and door jamb. It was learned that upon the arrival of firefighters this door was forced open to gain access to the interior of the structure for fire suppression activities.

Moving to the west side of the structure showed smoke staining on the exterior due to water run-off during fire suppression activities in the attic space and no fire damage. The gas meters were located on this side of the structure. The meters appeared in good condition and showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The gas meters were locked off by an Excel Energy employee during fire suppression activities.

A storm door to an enclosed porch was located on the west side of the residence toward the rear of the building. This door was found propped open. It was later learned that the occupant of Unit #1 exited this door during the fire event.

Several screens were pushed out and windows opened on the west side of the structure during the fire event by firefighters to aid in ventilation of the structure.

Moving to the north side of the structure revealed that this was the rear of the dwelling. A wooden egress deck and staircase ran from the second floor west side of the structure towards the north end of the dwelling to a staircase that exited on the north side of the structure. There was no smoke or fire damage to this exit structure or to this side of the building.

Examination of the two electric meter boxes located on the north side of the structure showed that the meter box to the west had a plate over the box indicating that it was not being utilized. The meter box to the east showed that Excel Energy had removed the meter socket during fire suppression activities. Neither meter box showed signs of smoke or fire damage and appeared in good condition. The raceways traveling from the drop weather head to the meter boxes appeared in good condition and showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. Observation of the weather heads showed signs of heavy rust on their exterior and no signs of smoke or fire damage.

Investigation of the east side of the structure revealed fire and smoke damage coming from a first floor window that was identified as belonging to the bedroom of the occupant of Unit #1. This smoke and fire damage formed an approximately four foot wide vector pattern on both sides of the bottom of the exterior of the bedroom window and extended upward towards the roofline of the structure as well as auto exposing the neighboring structure to the east.

Exterior Exam

Alarm and Security Services

None	Yes		
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Sprinkler Standpipes Smoke Detectors Present Smoke Detector Locations Fire Suppression

Closed And Locked	Unknown	
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Doors Windows Other Entrances

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Alarm Protection/Security Comments

Utilities

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Electrical Status Electrical Entrance

	Natural	Xcel Energy
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Fuel Status Fuel Type Fuel Company

	City of Saint Paul Municipal Water
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Water Status Water Company

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Telephone Status

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Utility Comments

Property Details (2 of 2)

Property

N/A

Name

329 Lawson Avenue West

1 & 2

Address

Apt/Suite/Room

Saint Paul

Ramsey County

Minnesota

55117

City

County

State

Postal Code

\$70,300.00

\$15,000.00

\$40,000.00

Pre Fire Value

Content Loss Value

Structure Loss Value

Property Description

Area

Structure

Urban

Area Type

Area Description

Area Quality

Structure

1 or 2 family dwelling		Occupied		
Property Use		Structure Occupancy		
		Unknown	Unknown	
Alarm Type		Smoke Detector Present	Smoke Detector Performance	
None				
Sprinkler Standpipes		Sprinkler Standpipes Performance		
40		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	
Basement	Vinyl	Pitched	Asphalt	
Foundation	Exterior Covering	Roof Type	Roof Material	

Examination of the interior of the structure began on the east side of the structure at a side door that was midway between the north and south end of the building. This door was found in the closed position and unlocked. There were no signs of forced entry on the door or doorframe.

This entrance led into the first floor unit. Inspection of the unit revealed that the kitchen appliances showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and were in good condition.

A window on the west side of the first floor that showed signs of fire damage breaking out the top pan of a double hung window. There was a small amount of smoke and fire damage above this window on the ceiling.

Moving back toward the kitchen on the north side of the house led to the basement stairs. Inspection of the basement showed no signs of fire damage and light smoke damage.

Observation of the water hear, furnace and clothes washer and dryer showed no signs of smoke or fire damage coming from within the appliances.

Inspection of the electric panel revealed no smoke or fire damage coming from the two electric panel boxes and they appeared in good condition. Both electric panels had their main power switch turned to the off position by firefighters during fire suppression activities. The electric panel located toward the north revealed that there was one tripped circuit breaker. Examination of the corresponding index located on the panel door showed that the #2 tripped circuit breaker was labeled "2nd Fl.. Lighting".

Moving toward the second floor showed heavy smoke damage to the staircase.

Observation of the second floor unit revealed heavy smoke damage to the kitchen from the ceiling level down to approximately the five foot level above the floor and moderate smoke damage continuing to floor level. Examination of the kitchen appliances showed no signs of smoke or fire damage coming from within the units and appeared in good condition.

Moving toward the south led to a living room. This room suffered heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level down to approximately the five foot level and moderate smoke damage continuing to floor level. Smoke patterns indicated that the smoke traveled from a bedroom door located to the west of the living room.

Examination of the bedroom located to the west of the living room revealed heavy smoke and fire damage. This damage was greatest toward the west as opposed to the east. This is the second floor window that was broken out during the fire event with auto exposing fire travel between the structures that came from the first floor window of the dwelling to west.

Observation of the bathroom showed heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level extending downward approximately

to the three foot level with moderate smoke continuing to floor level. There was no fire damage in this room.

A bedroom was located on the south side of the unit that faced the street. Inspection of this room, which had an open archway to the living room to the north, suffered heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level down to approximately the five foot level above the floor and moderate smoke damage continuing to the floor level. There was no fire damage in this room but there were signs of heat damage visible on the vinyl blinds on the south side of the room.

Inspection of the attic space, visible through several opening firefighters made during overhaul operations revealed light fire damage to the underside of the ceiling beams and fire damage along the west side of the attic space at the level of the soffits. Inspection of the electric service in the attic showed that it was in good condition in flexible conduit and electrical boxes.

Interior Exam

Observation of the south side of the structure revealed that this was the front of the structure. The front door was found in the closed position and unlocked. Occupants were home in this structure during the fire event. There were no signs of forced entry on this door or the doorframe. Inspection of this side of the structure showed light smoke staining around the gable end vent. There was heavy smoke staining visible to the second floor windows.

Examination of the west side of the structure showed heavy smoke and fire damage approximately midway back on the wall starting at the level of the first floor window. This smoke and fire damage vector pattern was approximately six feet wide at its base and increased in width to approximately ten feet near the roofline.

Examination revealed that fire moved from the first floor window of the adjacent structure to this structure. The smoke and fire damage on this structure fire damaged and broke a first floor window and extended into the dwelling on the first floor. Smoke and fire damage extended upward from this window and also broke out a second floor window and extended into the dwelling through this window. Above the second floor window there was evidence of fire extension into the eaves and attic space.

Inspection of north side of the property revealed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The electric meters and meter boxes were located on the northeast corner of the structure. Observation of the meter boxes as well as the raceway and weather head drop showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and appeared in good condition. The electric meters had been removed from the meter boxes by Excel Energy employees during the fire event.

Investigation of the east side of the structure showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The gas meter was located on this side of the structure, closest to the south wall. Observation of the gas meter revealed that it was in good condition and showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The gas meter was turned off by firefighters during suppression operations and then locked off by Excel Energy employees.

Exterior Exam

Alarm and Security Services

None	Unknown		
Sprinkler Standpipes	Smoke Detectors Present	Smoke Detector Locations	Fire Suppression
Closed And Locked	Closed And Locked		
Doors	Windows	Other Entrances	

Alarm Protection/Security Comments

Witness Statement (1 of 5)

Witness Statement

Nosie	Charles	331 Lawson
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Owner	
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Type

Employer

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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

12200 Upper Heather Ave N	
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Street 1

Street 2

Hugo	Minnesota	55038
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City

State

PostalCode

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Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

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Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (2 of 5)

Witness Statement

Harding	Tammy	
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Occupant	
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Type

Employer

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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

331 Lawson Ave W Upper Unit	
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Street 1

Street 2

Saint Paul	Minnesota	55117
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City

State

PostalCode

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Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

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Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (3 of 5)

Witness Statement

Starnes	Matthew	
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Discover of Fire	
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Type

Employer

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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

331 Lawson Ave W Lower Unit	
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Street 1

Street 2

Saint Paul	Minnesota	55117
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City

State

Postal Code

Black or African American	04/12/1985	
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Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

Q: Can you tell me how you first became aware of the fire tonight?

A: I was sitting in the front room after getting home and opening up the door and going back to the back and noticed smoke.

Q: Were any alarms sounding at that time?

A: The alarms, one of the alarms were taken down because of the carbon monoxide had went off a couple months ago and it..

Q: So it was quiet?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you see smoke towards the back?

A: Yup.

Q: Could you smell anything?

A: Not at first.

Q: Did you hear anything, like dogs barking or glass breaking?

A: Nope.

Q: Then what happened?

A: And then once I went through the back I could feel the foundation move and like the movement and that's what aroused me to open up the door and saw smoke.

Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (4 of 5)

Witness Statement

Burnett	Donna	M
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Owner/Occupant	
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Type

Employer

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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

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Street 1

Street 2

Saint Paul	Minnesota	
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City

State

PostalCode

	12/21/1962	
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Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

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Witness Statement Comments

Witness Statement (5 of 5)

Witness Statement

Burnett	Kenneth	D
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Last Name

First Name

Middle Name

Owner/Occupant	
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Type

Employer

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Interviewed Date

Interviewed By

Interviewed By Other

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Street 1

Street 2

Saint Paul	Minnesota	
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City

State

PostalCode

	11/12/1956	
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Race

Date of Birth

Driver's License Number

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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 in the southwest corner of the bedroom. The ignition source was probably an improperly discarded cigarette butt. The first fuel ignited was probably bedding located in the area of origin in the southwest corner of the bedroom. The action that brought these items together was due to improper disposal of smoking materials. 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