## Saint Paul Fire Department FIRE INCIDENT DISPOSITION



INCIDENT NUMBER:	15-35093	DATE OF INCIDENT: 10-29-2015		
TIME OF INCIDENT:	1530 Hours	.530 Hours POLICE CASE #: 15-234-019		
INVESTIGATOR(s):	J. Blank			
INCIDENT ADDRESS:	1008 Western Avenue North, Saint Paul, MN 55117			
OCCUPANT NAME:	Thomas L Gerlach	PHONE: 651-775-8776		
OWNER NAME:	Thomas L Gerlach	PHONE: 651-775-8776		
ADDRESS OF OWNER:	1008 Western Avenue North, Saint Paul, MN 55117			
PROPERTY DAMAGED:	Single Family Dwelling	origin on 1st Floor		
DAMAGE ESTIMATE:	Building \$100,000	Vehicle \$	Other (Describe) \$	
VALUE:	Building \$117,100	Vehicle \$	Other (Describe) \$	
Damage Estimate CONTENTS ONLY:	\$50,000			
INJURY/DEATH (if yes, explain)	No ☐ Yes			
SMOKE DETECTOR, SPRINKLER, and CARBON MONOXIDE INFORMATION:	Smoke Detector Present: Yes No Unknown Detector Functioning: Yes No Unknown Sprinkler System Present: Yes No Unknown Sprinkler Heads activated: Yes No Unknown C.O Detector Present: Yes No Unknown C.O Detector Present: Yes No Unknown    Accidental			
FIRE CAUSE CLASSIFICATION:				
SYNOPSIS:				
DISPOSITION:	E-mail only DO NOT DEMOLISH unti	ll approved 🔯 s	old Scene until approved cene Released eport to Follow	

## FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT

**INCIDENT NO: 15-35093** 

DATE: 10/29/2015

TIME: 1530 HOURS

ADDRESS: 1008 WESTERN AVE N

INSURANCE CO: UNKNOWN

DAMAGE ESTIMATE: \$150,000

CN#: 15-234-019

SYNOPSIS: On Thursday, October 29, 2015, at approximately 1530 hours, the Saint Paul Fire Department responded to a report of a dwelling fire. The location of the incident was 1008 Western Avenue North. Upon the arrival of the fire department, firefighters stretched hose lines and extinguished the fire. Upon my arrival, fire extinguishment and search and rescue were underway. The origin of the fire had several different and distinct points of origin. The classification of fire cause is incendiary.

PEOPLE: Property Owner/Witness, THOMAS L GERLACH (Father), 1008 Western Avenue North, 55117, 651-775-8776, DOB 05/01/1958.

Property Owner/Witness, LYNN M GERLACH, 1008 Western Avenue North, 55117, 651-775-8776, DOB 11/05/1962.

Possible Suspect, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), 1008 Western Avenue North, 55117, DOB 11/03/1983.

Witness, DANNY CHEVRE, (Related to WILLIAM CHEVRE who is an associate of THOMAS L GERLACH - Son).

Occupant/Witness, ANDREW B GERLACH, 1008 Western Avenue North, 55117, DOB 04/14/1986.

9-1-1 Caller,

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BACKGROUND: I received notification of the fire via the Communications Center at approximately 1531 hours. I responded to the incident scene and arrived at approximately 1543 hours. Engine #22's crew was the first arriving fire department vehicle. At the time of my arrival, fire extinguishment and search and rescue were underway. At the time of the fire, the visibility was overcast, the temperature was approximately 47°F, and the winds were out of the northwest at approximately 15 miles per hour.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: The fire damaged structure is a two-story single-family dwelling. The foundation is flagstone. The exterior walls were covered with stucco. The structure has a pitched roof covered with asphalt shingles. The interior walls were covered with plaster

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and lath. The structure measures approximately 30 feet wide by 50 feet deep. The front of the structure faces west and the structure runs west to east.

EXTERIOR EXAMINATION: Visual inspection of the west side of the structure revealed that this was the front of the structure. There was evidence of smoke staining above the front door starting at about the five-foot level and extending to an overhang located above the front door. The front windows were all intact on the first floor and were wrapped in plastic. The plastic showed signs of heat damage on all three windows and was partially melted. Examination of the second floor window revealed that one of the windows was forcibly removed by firefighters during firefighting operations and was left lying on the porch roof.

Observations of the north side of the structure showed that all of the windows were intact and in the closed position. Inspection of the second window located to the east of the west wall of the structure revealed smoke staining to the bottom of the windowsill along with smoke and heat damage visible to the window blinds. Examination of the basement windows on the north side of structure revealed that both windows were intact and in the closed position. The gas meter was located on the north side of the structure and showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and appeared in good condition. The gas meter was found in the "on" position.

Examination of the east side of the structure revealed light smoke damage over the rear door and over the first floor kitchen windows. Firefighters broke out the kitchen windows during firefighting operations. A window located on the second floor was broken out by firefighters during firefighting operations to aid in ventilation.

Inspection of the south side of the structure showed that the second front porch window to the west was broken out by firefighters during firefighting operations. Observations of the three first floor windows, belonging to the main part of the structure that jutted out from the front porch and rear kitchen area, showed signs of heavy burning to their upper portions on all three windows, with smoke staining extending from the halfway point of each window and extending above the top of the window frame. Inspection of both basement windows on the side of the structure showed that they were intact and in the closed position.

The electric meter was located on the south side of the structure on the east side of the bump out of the main structure. The electric meter appeared in good condition and showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The meter was removed by Xcel Energy during the fire. Inspection of the conduit that ran from the meter upwards, towards the weather-head showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The wire connections at the weather-head that came in from the utility pole showed no signs of damage.

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Observations of the second floor windows on the south side of the structure revealed that the windows were intact during the fire event. Firefighters opened several of the windows during search and rescue efforts to assist in ventilation of the second floor. There were two air-conditioners located on this side of the structure. Neither air-conditioner showed signs of smoke or fire damage.

INTERIOR EXAMINATION: Entry into the structure was made via the back door which was located on the east side of the structure. Examination of the back door revealed that the door was possibly forced open due to evidence of a door knob located on the ground on both the exterior and interior of the door as well as part of the door jamb missing where the dead bolt inserts.

Inspection of the kitchen, which was located just inside the rear door of the structure, up three stairs towards the south, revealed heavy smoke and fire damage.

Examination of the staircase leading to the second floor revealed that the door was open to the staircase during the fire and heavy smoke damage extended from the ceiling down to approximately six inches below the door handle with medium smoke damage continuing to the floor. Observations of the staircase revealed heavy smoke damage from the ceiling extending all the way to the floor. There was no visible fire damage in the staircase.

Observations of the second floor revealed moderate to heavy smoke damage throughout and no signs of fire damage. Inspection of the refrigerator, stove, and microwave showed no signs of interior smoke or fire damage. Inspection of the south wall of the kitchen revealed heavy smoke damage that extended from the ceiling down to approximately one foot above the floor. Fire damage along the south wall extended from the ceiling down to approximately the countertop level. Along the south wall there was heavy fire damage to the wall cabinets located closest to the west where there was an opening towards the dining room area. Located to the east of this damage was an area of cabinets with less fire damage. Located to the east of these cabinets was again an area of heavy fire damage closest to the cast wall of the structure.

Inspection of the east wall of the kitchen revealed heavy fire damage from the ceiling extending down to the floor. Initial reports from the first arriving captain revealed that the windows on this side of the structure were intact upon their arrival with no fire venting from them and only smoke visible. Inspection of the wall below the windows revealed evidence of burning that was lower than along the east wall of the kitchen that extended from the level of the windowsill down towards the floor. Observations of the ceiling, located directly above the east wall, revealed an area of clean burn.

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Moving towards the west there was a dining room with a bedroom located to the north. Investigation of the bedroom to the north of the dining room revealed that the door was shut during the fire. Inspection of the bedroom revealed moderate smoke damage throughout and no fire damage.

Examination of the dining room revealed heavy fire damage and smoke damage throughout. There was an area of heavy fire damage closest to the east as compared to the west. The southeast corner of the dining room, along the walls and ceiling, showed clean burn. Located in the middle of the dining room, on the floor, was an empty can labeled, "Acetone". This can was missing its screw-on lid. This item was collected as evidence.

Located to the west of the dining room was a living room. Examination of the living room revealed heavy smoke damage and fire damage extending from the ceiling down to approximately the two-foot level above the floor. Located behind the front door which was located on the west side of the living room was an area of fire damage that was more severe than everywhere else in the living room. This area of clean burn was located in the northwest corner of the living room. Examination of the front door revealed no signs of forced entry and was found unlocked but closed by the homeowner. The homeowner opened the front door and left it in the open position upon discovery of the fire.

Entry to the basement was made from the east side of the structure just inside the back door. There was no fire damage on the staircase leading to the basement. There was heavy smoke damage starting at the floor level even with the first floor landing, all the way to the ceiling.

Examination of the basement showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. Inspection of the clothes washer and dryer, water heater, and furnace revealed no signs of smoke or fire damage and all appeared in good condition. Observations of the breaker panel revealed that it had been turned off at the main breaker by firefighters and there were numerous breakers tripped. The front panel to the breaker box was reported missing by firefighters when they shut off the main breaker. Inspection of the interior of the breaker box, as well as the wires above the breaker box, showed no signs of smoke or fire damage and no arcing was visible.

<u>INTERVIEWS:</u> Property Owner, THOMAS L GERLACH (Father), stated in person on Thursday, October 29, 2015:

- I work at a glass installation company.
- I was returning home from work when I saw smoke coming from the closed front door of my house.
- My son, ANDREW B GERLACH, works with me and we arrived home at the same time.

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- I opened the front door, which wasn't locked, and there was heavy smoke inside my home and it appeared that the carpet was on fire.
- I left the house before my wife this morning.
- My other son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), is suicidal and texted me today that he wanted to die.
- I wasn't sure if my son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), was inside the house at the time of the fire.
- My son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), has a drug problem.
- I didn't see my son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), at the house today.
- I don't know whether we have homeowners insurance because the bank refinanced our house.
- We haven't had any electrical problems in the house.
- I did not leave any candles burning in the house.
- My son, ANDREW B GERLACH, has some learning disabilities and was concerned that his
  pets in the basement were going to get killed in the fire.

## Property Owner, LYNN M GERLACH, stated in person on Thursday, October 29, 2015:

- I left for work today at around 8:00 a.m.
- No one else was home when I left the house.
- I got home after the fire department was already here.
- When I left home this morning I locked both the front and back door.
- I did not leave any candles burning in the house.
- All of the downstairs windows were closed and locked when I left for work this morning.
- The only window that was open was maybe the bathroom window located on the second floor.

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- I don't think my son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), set the fire.
- My son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), has undiagnosed mental problems.
- My son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), has never hurt anyone.
- I did not see my son, THOMAS L GERLACH (Son), at the house today.

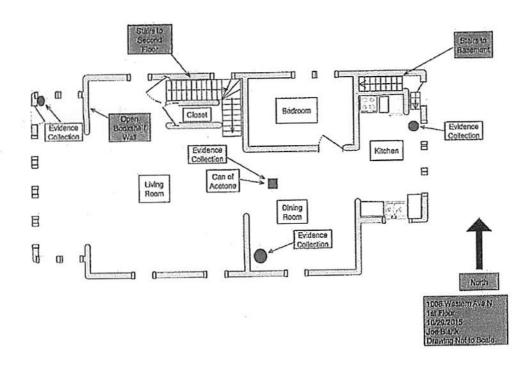
<u>PHOTOGRAPHS/SKETCH</u>: Digital photographs were taken and a sketch was made of the first floor of the structure.

**EVIDENCE:** Four items of evidence was collected and transported back to the Fire Investigator's locked evidence locker. The evidence was then transported to the BCA and the Saint Paul Police Department Evidence Room.

CONCLUSION: After examination of the fire scene and fire patterns of both movement and intensity observed, my conclusion is this fire originated in several different areas on the first floor of the structure including the northeast corner of the living room, the southeast corner of the dining room, and the east wall of the kitchen. The ignition source was probably an open flamed device. The first fuel ignited was probably an ignitable liquid. The action that brought these items together was an intentional human act. The classification of fire cause is incendiary. This report will be forwarded to the Saint Paul Police Department for further investigation. This concludes my report and investigation.

J. Blank, Fire Investigator, A Shift, 11/13/2015

JB/su



**MAGETREND** IRE BRIDGE NFIRS-1 10 29 2016 | SPFD151028035093 | 08 Basic MN 62210 Concestrad | 0308 1-100 Check this best to indicate that the address for this incident is presided on the Wildland Fire Location Type В IN WESTERN Ave X Street address 1008 Intersection SAINT PAUL MN | 65117 in front of Row of Adjacent to a er Kalenel Odd, as applicable Directions **US National Grid** Manket is 0000 E2 Shifts and Alarms F1 Dates and Times C Incident Type A 1 D2 Hour Min Sec Year 111 Bulden for North ALARIA 10 Day 29 15:31:26 Alum 2015 Ald Given or Received E3 Special Studies 15:33:62 Mutual aid received 2015 Arrival 10 28 Automatic aid received Controlled Mutual aid given Automotic aid given 17:53:37 2015 Last Unit 29 10 Other ald given N × Nano G2 Estimated Dollar Lasues and Values Ģ1 Resources Actions Taken Check this box and test the blech than Apparatus or Personnel LOSSES Anglish for all first Manyon. 11 Edinguishment by the service personnel Property \$ 100,000 Parsonnel Primary Action Taken (II) 110 Contents \$ 50,000 Addition Action Takes (2)
12 Salvage & overhead EMS 12 110 PRE-INCIDENT VALUE: Optional Property \$-Other 110 Action Telesco (FA Contents \$ Chack has Frequent a current Mixed Use Property H3 Hezardous Materials Release Casualties **Completed Modules** Н١ Miled use, other Special HarMiri autions required or spill >4 55 gal. X Fire-2 Service LO Assembly use ᆜᅝ 10 Natural gas; storr (eak, no evan, or Hazhiel octions X Structure Fice-3 Educational use Propeno ges - Less than a 21 lb, lank CMflan Fire Cas-4 Civilian | D 33 Medical use Gasoline - vehicle fuel tank or portable container Fire Service Cas.-6 3 Stankienikal uta 40 Kejosone - fizel burning oguipmen/partable storage H2 Detector EM8-6 Row of stores 51 Otesel fuel/firel oil - vehicle fuel lank/portable Register brooksetter. Delector blorted cocupants HazMal-7 Enclosed mall 63 Household/ordes solvent or chemical spi3 WildLand Fire-8 Detector did not alert occupants Business and residential use Motor ell - from engine or pertable container X Apparatus-0 Unknown 69 Office use Paini - spife loss than 55 gallons X Personnal-10 00 Arson-11 Miliary use 61 65 Parm uso Nat mixed use

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54 12	Equipment involved in ignition If equipment was not involved, skip to Gestian G  phoset kentred  cold cold	F2 Equipment Power Source  Experie Power terrer  Experie Power terrer  F3 Equipment Portability  1 Portable  2 Stationary  Fetable supposed correct per language and experience in designed in the second in statisty in design in the second in statisty in the second in s	None	
H 1 2 3	1 Mobile Property involved Not involved in Ignition, but burned Involved in Ignition, but did not itself burn Involved in Ignition and burned	H2 Mobile Property Type and Make Pro-Fire Plan Available  See of the Manadam presented in the report attached  Palice report attached  Coroner report attached  Other reports attached	based upon reports from althor agreede s	,

A	SPFD161029035093 0	NFIRS-3 Structure Fire
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M1 Presence of Automatic Extinguishing System  1 Prosent 2 Partial System Prosent N X None Present U Undetermined  W2 Type of Automatic Extinguishing System Reservit Desired System officer 1 Wet-pipe sprinkfor system 2 Dry-pipo sprinkfor system 2 Dry-pipo sprinkfor system 3 Other sprinkfor system 4 Dry chemical system 5 Foam system 6 Hategen-type system 7 Carbon dodde system U Undetermined	M3 Operation of Automatic Extinguishing System o Operation of AES, other seases the wystin seased use Operation of AES, other system operated and was effective System operated and was not effective Fire too small to activate system System did not operate Undetermined M3 Number of Sprinkler Heads Operating Regulated system operated  Limber of sprinkler Heads Operating	Mis Reason for Automatic Extinguishing System Falluro Redard misspatere and pactor Redard misspatere Redard

J Property Use Structures 419 X 1 or 2 temby dwelling 311 24-how care Nursing homes, 4 or more persons 241 Adul education center, college classroom 162 Barr or highlight 404 Barracks, domitory 439 Beards, domitory 439 Beards, conting house, resistantial hotels 839 Burshass office 131 Charth, mosque, synapogue, temple, chapel  **Contraction site** 655 Crops or orchard 919 Dump, sentary tandits	341 Cirio, citilo-lype infernary 342 Dector, dential or oral surgeon office 315 Electricogenerating plant 319 Electricogenerating plant 319 Pool and beverage astes, grocery starro 319 Pool and beverage astes, grocery starro 319 Hospital-meditud or psychiatric 440 Hotel/inciel, commercial 339 Hospital-meditud or psychiatric 339 Hospital-meditud or psychiatric 340 Hotel/inciel, commercial 341 Jul, prison (not hyrorital) 341 Jul, prison (not hyrorital) 342 Lube, heer, stream 343 Open hand or Oct 344 Pingground	629 Laboratory or science laboratory  109 Libestock, postly storage  700 Manufacturing, processing  579 Motor verifies or boat sales, services, capair  429 Multiburity dreating  822 Parking garage, general vehicle  459 Residential board and care  161 Resisturant or catcleria  571 Service salest, gas station  891 Warefucuse  930 Street, other  100 Property Use of the services of t
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K2 Owner Same as general boother? Then check this best and of the block.  Lead Option Check this bout it deeps Lead option in the check Lead option L	Bushers (MappCoddit)  Id., Ma., Ltr., Fru Hume  1008  Norther  Pests  WESTERN  Secrit or Options  Apilipularitean  City  MN   65117   -	Aria Cada Proce Chamber
Authorization    3612   David Berger   3612   David Berger   3612   David Berger   David Berger   David Berger	DC	2016     Yes   2015     Yes

## Remarks Local Option

FIRE PERSONNEL WERE CALLED FOR A DWELLING FIRE IN A SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE. ON ARRIVAL, ENGINE #22'S CREW BEGAN ATTACKING THE FIRE IN AN OFFENSIVE POSITION. LADDER #22'S CREW BEGAN A SEARCH OF THE SECOND FLOOR. WHILE CREWS WERE SEARCHING, WE RECEIVED WORD FROM POLICE OFFENSIVE POSITION. LADDER #22'S CREW BEGAN A SEARCH OF THE SECOND FLOOR. IT WAS RELAYED THIS PERSON IS DANGEROUS AND HAD THAT THE PERSON WHO POSSIBLY STARTED THIS FIRE MAY INSIDE HIDING ON THE SECOND FLOOR. THE FIRE WAS EXTINGUISHED POLICE SWEPT THE WEAPONS IN HIS POSSESSION. CREWS COMPLETED THEIR SEARCH AND EXITIED THE BUILDING. ONCE THE FIRE WAS EXTINGUISHED POLICE SWEPT THE ENTIRE HOUSE AND AREA LOOKING FOR THE POSSIBLE SUSPECT IN THIS FIRE AND OTHER CRIMES. THE MALE WAS NOT FOUND SO CREWS BEGAN OVERHAUL AND FIRE INVESTIGATOR BLANK PERFORMED HIS INVESTIGATION.

THIS FIRE APPEARED TO BE ARSON DUE TO THE ODOR, THE ACCELLERANTS FOUND, AND THE INVESTIGATION RESULTS. ONCE THE INVESTIGATION WAS COMPLETE, CREWS WASHED DOWN THE FIRST FLOOR AND THEN THE HOME WAS TURNED OVER TO THE FAMILY SO MEMBERS COULD RETRIEVE ANY SALVALGEABLE BELONGINGS FROM THE SECOND FLOOR AND BASEMENT. RED CROSS WAS CALLED FOR THE FAMILY AS WELL DUE TO THE HOME BEING UNINHABITABLE, THE GAS AND ELECTRIC WERE SHUT OFF AND XCEL DID THEIR INVESTIGATION AS WELL.