FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT

INCIDENT NO: 14-22898 DATE: 07/28/2014 TIME: 2315 HOURS

ADDRESS: 609/611 SNELLING AVENUE INSURANCE CO: UNKNOWN

DAMAGE ESTIMATE: $412,000

SYNOPSIS: On Monday, July 28, 2014, at approximately 2315 hours, the Saint Paul Fire Department responded to a report of a dwelling fire. The location of the incident was 609/611 Snelling Avenue. Upon the fire department's arrival, fire suppression personnel stretched hose lines and extinguished the fire. Upon my arrival, fire extinguishment and search and rescue were underway. The origin of the fire appeared to be in the base of the refrigerator. The classification of fire cause is accidental.

PEOPLE: Property Owner, RENAE C REED, 8440 West Main Street, Winona, Minnesota, 55987, 507-689-2519.

Occupant, MARIO DEJESUS MATUTE LOPEX, 611 Snelling Avenue North, Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55104, 651-403-0053, DOB 12/24/1970.

Occupant, MARIO PINEDA, 611 Snelling Avenue North, Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55104, 651-403-0053, DOB 12/16/1981.

Occupant, MARIO (UNKNOWN LAST NAME), 611 Snelling Avenue North, Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55104, 651-403-0053.

Occupant, RENEE REDD, 609 Snelling Avenue North, Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55104, 507-689-2519.

BACKGROUND: I received notification of the fire via the Communications Center at approximately 2315 hours. I responded to the incident scene and arrived at approximately 2324 hours. Squad #2 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 clear, the temperature was approximately 55 degrees Fahrenheit, and the winds were calm.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: The fire-damaged structure is a two story, up/down duplex. The foundation is a concrete slab. The exterior walls were covered with stucco. The structure has a pitched roof covered with asphalt shingles. The interior walls were covered in some places with plaster and lath and other areas in dry wall. The structure measures approximately 25 feet wide by 40 feet deep. The front of the structure faces east and the structure runs east to west.

EXTERIOR EXAMINATION: Visual inspection of the east side of the structure revealed no smoke or fire damage. The 609 entrance which goes to the first floor, is located to the south of the 611 entrance, which goes to the second floor. The gas meter was located near the southeast corner and appeared in good condition with no smoke or fire damage found. The south and north sides of the structure suffered no smoke or fire damage.

Observations of the west side of the structure revealed smoke and fire damage to the wooden porch located on the second floor belonging to the 611 unit. The fire damage extended from the floor level of the west wall upwards into the soffit at the roofline. The damage to the soffit was most severe in the area located above the window that was located closest to the south wall of the structure. The railing that went around the porch for the second floor suffered the most damage along the south side where it connected to the structure.

Examination of the west wall showed a vector pattern that indicated the heaviest burning occurred along the west wall to the north of the window. There were numerous pots and pans located on the deck flooring. Examination of the second floor deck flooring from below did not show any signs of heavy charring or complete burn through. The electric meters, located on the northwest side of the building, appeared in good condition and showed no signs of smoke or fire damage. The electric weather head and drop down conduit appeared in good condition with no smoke or fire damage.

INTERIOR EXAMINATION: Visual inspection of the 609 first floor unit revealed light smoke damage throughout. Inspection of the kitchen stove and refrigerator showed no signs of smoke or fire damage coming from these appliances. Both the front and back doors had been forced open by firefighters.

Examination of the stairs that lead to the basement level showed light smoke damage and no fire damage. The basement suffered light smoke damage throughout. Inspection of the water heater and furnace did not show any signs of smoke or fire damage coming from these appliances. The two clothes washers and dryers showed no signs of smoke or fire damage coming from them.

Observations of the electric panels revealed that the panel to the left had all of the breakers turned off by firefighters. The electric panel to the right had all of the breakers turned off by firefighters. Neither electrical panel showed signs of smoke or fire damage.

The second floor hallway experienced heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level down to approximately the one foot level above the floor with moderate smoke damage continuing to the floor level.

Inspection of the rear interior staircase going from the first floor to the second floor showed moderate smoke damage but no fire damage. Examination of the front staircase that went from the second floor and discharged to the north side of the exterior showed heavy smoke damage from the ceiling level down to approximately the two foot level with moderate smoke damage continuing to floor level.

The front living room, bathroom, and bedroom suffered heavy smoke damage from the ceiling down to approximately the three-foot level and lighter smoke damage down to the floor.

Inspection of the kitchen located on the west end of the second floor revealed fire and smoke damage. The south wall of the kitchen suffered fire damage that became more severe moving from the east toward the west wall. The vector pattern of fire damage along the south wall indicated the fire traveled from lower down along the west wall and upward and to the east along the south wall. The east wall of the kitchen suffered heavy smoke and heat damage from the ceiling level down to approximately the two-foot level above the floor level.

Examination of the stove located along the east wall showed that there was no smoke or fire damage coming from this appliance.

The refrigerator showed a vector pattern on the rear of the unit that matched a vector pattern that was located on the west wall of the kitchen. Below the refrigerator there were burn marks on the laminate flooring. This was the lowest level of burning in the kitchen. The interior of the refrigerator was examined and showed no evidence of smoke or fire damage. Vector burn patterns located on the exterior of the refrigerator showed that the fire may have traveled from the area of the window located to the south of the refrigerator towards the north. Inspection of the bottom of the refrigerator showed no smoke or fire damage.

To rule out the refrigerator as the point of origin for the fire, the rear metal panel that covers the compressor and electrical inlet to the refrigerator was partially removed. Inspection of the interior space located behind the cover plate revealed burning on the interior of the refrigerator and splattering of metal around where the electrical cord is attached to the unit. In addition, there was charring to the insulation of the electrical cord, to the interior insulation, and charring to the interior of the cover plate. The location of the refrigerator against the west wall of the kitchen matches up with the heaviest damage on the exterior of the west wall of the kitchen.

INTERVIEWS: Occupant, MARIO DEJESUS MATUTE LOPEX, stated in person on Monday, July 28, 2014:

- I rent the upstairs unit at 611 Snelling with my two friends.
- We were sleeping when we woke up to the smoke detector going off.

- We saw fire out on the rear deck.
- We have a cigarette butt can outside on the rear deck.
- We haven't had any problems with our refrigerator.
- We haven't had any unusual electrical problems in the house.

Witness, Captain Engine #23, stated in person on Monday, July 28, 2014:

- When we came into the rear of the house, we saw fire coming from the back of the refrigerator.
- The colors of the flames were green and red.

PHOTOGRAPHS/SKETCH: Digital photographs were taken.

EVIDENCE: No evidence was collected.

CONCLUSION: After examination of the fire scene and fire patterns of both movement and intensity observed, my conclusion is this fire originated in the northwest corner of the kitchen in the base of the refrigerator. The ignition source was an electrical malfunction. The first fuel ignited was combustible materials around the electrical wiring. The action that brought these items together was probably an electrical short. The classification of fire cause is accidental. This concludes my report and investigation.

J. Blank, Fire Investigator, A Shift, 08/12/2014

JB/su