



ALDER'S POINT FIRE SUMMARY

**WINSTON-SALEM FIRE DEPARTMENT
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OCTOBER 1, 2009



Alder's Point Fire Summary

The Winston-Salem Fire Department responded to a fire alarm at 590 Mock Street on Tuesday, July 14, 2009. Fire personnel arrived to find a fire in the attic and upper floor of the apartment building. This summary outlines the department's actions during suppression activities, people management during the fire, and victim management activities after the fire. This document also includes recommendations for the Alder's Point management and future activities that will establish a continuous review of evacuation and fire drill procedures with the Alder's Point establishment.

The Fire Department's main priorities were: life safety, property conservation, incident stabilization, and fire extinguishment. Fire units were dispatched to 590 Mock Street on July 14, 2009 to a confirmed apartment fire. This facility is occupied by elderly non-ambulatory and ambulatory persons of 55 years or older: therefore, it was inevitably a life safety priority. The first arriving Fire Unit was immediately notified of elderly residents that needed assistance in evacuating the building, especially in the immediate vicinity of the fire.

The initial strategic plan by the first arriving officer was to support the sprinkler system, establish interior hose lines, and initiate an aggressive evacuation tactic. Fire units assisted all occupants out of the structure without any major injuries and the fire was confined to the center wing.

Since June of 2007, there have been over five public educational programs with the citizens of Alder's Point regarding safety, evacuation and fire prevention. These educational programs were absolutely beneficial in the safe evacuation of the residents. However, as previously mentioned, the department needs to continue to enhance its public educational programs to assure residents are continuing to demonstrate an understanding of fire safety and an awareness of procedures and actions during emergency incidents.

Time Line

- 5:30: p.m. Call received by operator
- 5:31: Call routed to dispatcher
- 5:31: Fire units were dispatched to a fire alarm at 590 Mock Street
- 5:32: Units en Route: Engine #4, 6, Truck #2, Battalion Chief 2
- 5:33: Car 14 advised that light smoke was visible from Main Street
- 5:33: Battalion Chief 2 requested one additional engine company:
Truck #1
- 5:34: Rescue 1 en route
- 5:35: Engine #4 advised heavy smoke visible from Mock Street and instructed Engine #6 to connect to the FDC
- 5:35: Engine #4 arrived on the scene and reported a three story wood and brick structure with heavy smoke visible from the 3rd floor in the front of the building. Battalion Chief 1 requested an additional unit
- 5:36: Engine #1 was dispatched / en route
- 5:36: Engine #6 arrived and connected to FDC and hydrant at Mock Street and Alder
- 5:38: Engine #4 notified command there was a confirmed rescue in the apartment directly in front of the fire room and they would be making an interior rescue attack
- 5:39: Battalion Chief 2 arrived, assumed Command, and established a Command Post at the front of the structure
- 5:39: Truck #1 and Truck #2 arrived
- 5:40: Rescue #1 arrived
- 5:43: Engine #1 arrived

Communications received and processed the call well within expectation. The call was processed in 44 seconds and the total reaction time 4:51. The fire engine response time was 4:07.

The **initial** units that began fire suppression activities arrived at the scene by 5:39 and began to implement fire strategies and tactics to evacuate the building and suppress the fire. These units included E-4, E-6, T-2, T-1, and B-2. This equates to 4 units with a command unit on the scene in approximately 8 minutes (16 on scene in 8 minutes * **NFPA 1710**) R-1 arrived one (1) minute later and E-1 arrived three (3) minutes later. The total units at this point in time were six (6) fire units and 1 command officer in 12 minutes. This equates to 23 personnel available to work on the fire. Incident commanders rotated fire units to supplement the needs of the incident. The Fire Department cleared the scene at 1:05 AM.

Conditions Upon Arrival

Personnel noticed some residents were still in the building and was not aware of the fire. Some residents were also gathering in the front of the building but not moving away from the building. Bystanders were also assembling and congregating in front of the building. Vehicles had stopped in the street in front of the entrance to the apartments. Fire personnel had to direct residents from the front of the building to a safe place so that fire personnel could set up equipment. Vehicles were motioned to move. There was one driver who left his vehicle on the street blocking the main entrance who had to move before Engine #4 could maneuver into the parking lot area. These obstacles had to be addressed by Fire personnel before they positioned vehicles and equipment to begin fire-fighting activities. Heavy smoke was visible from the front of the building, the rear of the center section and the north section was visibly on fire.

Fire Attack

Fire personnel focused on preventing the fire from spreading to the three wings of the building. The Incident Command Structure was reorganized - Incident Commander (Captain Robert Moricle, Jr.), Operation (Chief Leroy Davis) and Safety (Captain Aaron Noah). Fire attack crews were positioned to stop fire spread on the 2nd and 3rd floors and in the attic areas by pulling ceilings and stopping the fire as it approached the unburned areas of the attic. Master streams were incorporated to knock down the main body of the fire in the center section of the building. The roof area is constructed with trusses, which fueled the fire. Fire personnel were able to get ahead of the fire and bring it under control in 2 hours and 10 minutes. Crews were established to handle evacuation, fire suppression, victim assistance, and safety during this incident. Once the incident action plan was established, fire crews began to control the spread of the fire and extinguished the fire.

Evacuation

It is important to note that many of the residents were not aware of the fire. Several residents, along with the custodian, returned inside the building to help others, who wasn't aware of the fire, to exit. Many residents were moving toward the center of the building and congregating when fire personnel arrived. Much of the initial effort focused on assisting the occupants in exiting the building. Crews were assigned to search each wing to expedite evacuation due to the

volume of fire. Fire Department personnel conducted primary, secondary, and additional searches to make sure that all residents were out of the building. All residents were moved to a staging area across the street until fire personnel and the Alder's Point staff could begin to identify residents by the roster.

People Management

Once residents had been accounted for, Alder's Point Management, Fire, Emergency Management, and the Red Cross began to determine the sheltering need for the victims. There were 97 residents displaced due to the fire. Emergency Management used the Alder's Point Club House as an initial shelter to sort out immediate needs, including medications. The Alder's Point Management assisted with verifying all residents. Emergency Management and the American Red Cross worked with Fire staff to determine residents that would need lodging, food, and other items due to being displaced. The SIMS Center was designated as a shelter and the residents were moved there for further processing. This shelter remained open for 3 days until displaced residents were moved to housing or to a hotel. Twenty-seven residents needed immediate accommodations. This number changed as residents acquired lodging arrangements.

Investigation

- Fire Investigators responded to the scene and conducted an investigation of the fire cause and origin, which included numerous interviews with bystanders and residents.
- At a later date and time, a private fire investigation company was hired by the insurance company to conduct a separate cause and origin investigation.
- The fire investigation concluded that the fire originated on the exterior deck of Unit #201.
- The resident of Unit #201 was not at home during the time of the fire but was located the next day when he returned from work.
- According to the resident of Unit #201, plastic furniture and a wicker chair were stored on the deck.
- Two possible electrical sources on the deck of Unit #201 were examined by our investigators, the Chief Electrical Inspector for the City and the private investigation company. The wiring showed no indications of any type electrical failure.
- The HVAC unit, adjacent to Unit #201, was examined and showed no indications of any type failure.
- There were no indicators of an intentionally set fire.
- There were no reports or indications of lightning strikes in the area prior to the fire.
- The only item that could not be ruled out was improperly discarded smoking materials.

- The resident of Unit #201 did advise that he smoked on his deck and in the bathroom of his unit.
- The resident of Unit #201 advised that he kept his cigarette butts in a plastic container on the deck or in his bathroom.
- The exterior deck of Unit #201 revealed heavy fire damage to the combustible flooring and along the exterior walls.
- All items on the deck were completely consumed.
- The fire spread from the combustible flooring on the deck of Unit #201 upward and involved the combustible flooring on the deck of Unit #301.
- The fire entered the soffit area of the roof and into the attic area.
- The heavy heat from the fire also broke out the glass in the windows of Unit #201 which allowed fire to enter into the interior of the unit.
- The fire was able to spread quickly in the attic area but was contained by “smoke barrier walls” from consuming the entire attic of the building.
- The fire damage was most extensive to Unit #201, Unit #301, and the attic area.
- After ruling out all other possible causes, the most probable cause of this fire is improperly discarded smoking materials.
- The private investigation company concluded the fire started on the exterior deck of Unit #201 which was caused by improperly discarded smoking materials.

Recovery

Management has initiated the rebuild process. Permits have been issued and the construction is now taking place with a December of 2009 projection for completion. Residents have been moved to temporary residents until the rebuilding is completed. Due to the nature of financial resources, it took several days to several weeks to establish accommodations for the approximately 27 to 30 displaced residents that needed shelter.

Recommendations and Summary

The Alder’s Point fire was a physical and mentally exhausting fire that challenged the Fire Department staff, the Alder’s Point residents, and the community. Our department will continue to work with the Alder’s Point management staff and residents with a focus on fire prevention, safety, and effective evacuation planning. The department will conduct pre-incident planning to meet the needs of this facility and the residents.

Fire Department actions led to a successful suppression of the fire. Due to their efforts, most of the building was saved and there were no casualties due to this incident. The Fire Department suffered one injury due to heat exhaustion and that individual has fully recovered. There were challenges that emergency responders had to overcome as they dealt with the fire. They included residents having problems getting out of the building due to health or medical conditions, residents not being aware of the fire, occupants and bystanders congregating in the areas where fire personnel needed to position vehicles, a fire that had spread to the attic area well before units arrived, access to the area where the fire was located, and people management after the fire. These conditions were addressed by the Fire Department staff and by incident command as officers initiated tactics and strategies to address the fire problem.

The Fire Department thanked the residents, the Alder's Point staff and managers, and bystanders for their assistance during and after the fire. The Fire Chief commended the performance of all firefighters that worked on this fire without any casualties. There are always lessons to learn from fire incidents. The department will continue on criterion that are important in every fire including clear and concise incident action plans, incident command, quick fire attack, the protection of victims and personnel, and the conservation of property.

The following items will enhance safety and provide more effective actions in the future:

1. Develop evacuation plans and require staff and residents to review the plans annually.
2. Conduct evaluation drills to include the Fire Department.
3. Emphasize actions of residents during emergencies as follows:
 - a. Leave the building
 - b. Proceed to designated area
 - c. Move away from entrances and areas where emergency vehicles will need to stage
 - d. Do not go back into the building
4. General safety practices:
 - a. Do not leave food unattended while cooking
 - b. Smoke in designated areas and be sure cigarette butts are properly disposed
 - c. Treat every alarm as if it is a fire
 - d. Follow facility guidelines for space heaters
5. Review the process for evacuating special needs residents
6. Put a system in place that notes medicines being used by residents and a method to collect these medicines after an emergency.
7. Keep a current record of special needs / physically challenged residents.
8. Fire staff will conduct risk assessments and use information for pre-incident planning for this location.

* National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is the authority on fire, electrical, and building safety. This organization creates and maintains minimum standards and requirements for fire prevention and suppression activities, training, equipment and life-safety codes and standards. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) established this standard (1710) to define the minimum staffing, organization structure, and deployment of fire and rescue services in career fire departments during incidents. The criterion establishes the minimum response that will provide responders with personnel and the command staff necessary to operate a safe and effective fire incident. Key components include the Call receipt and processing time, Turnout time or the time interval between the notification of the emergency units and the unit beginning its response. A career department will deploy a minimum of 14 or 15 fire personnel and the necessary equipment within an 8-minute response time to 90 percent of the incidents to manage a fire. This includes provisions for establishing incident command, a water supply, attack lines, backup lines, search and ventilations, a fast attack crew, and an Aerial truck operator is required at the incident.