



ARCATA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

631 NINTH STREET, ARCATA, CA 95521-6204
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARCATA RESIDENT DIES IN HOUSE FIRE

Arcata, CA- (December 7, 2013) - Arcata Fire District personnel responded to 210 H Street, Arcata last night at 5:55 pm after receiving a report of a residential structure fire with possible entrapment. Firefighters arrived within two minutes and reported a heavily involved single family residence with fire threatening to spread to a two story apartment complex. The occupants of the house were unaccounted for so the first arriving crew made an aggressive attempt to enter through the front door and search for possible occupants inside of the burning home. The second arriving engine began extinguishment of the apartment complex and prepared for fire control of the burning residence.

The engine company that was searching for possible occupants inside of the main fire building was hampered by extreme heat and high fuel loading, specifically, furniture and personal belongings, inside of the home. The search crew had to exit the structure and reposition to the back of the home where conditions were more tenable. The search crew used a tactic called Vent/Enter/Search (VES) to gain access into the back of the home and search for occupants. Battalion Chief Campbell reported, "The VES tactic is a high risk, aggressive maneuver where firefighters enter the burning structure without a hose line to search for trapped occupants. The crew searches all interior portions of the structure while fire is rapidly consuming the building. Firefighters on the outside are not able to put water on the fire during this time because that would cause fire to be pushed onto the search crew. If you watch some of the videos that are out there, it appears as though we are not doing anything as the house is consumed by fire. That is not an accurate observation, as we are trying to save a life by putting our crews inside of the burning building to find occupants. In this case, we intentionally did not put water on the main fire because it would have burned our firefighters. This buys time for the search crew to try and locate and remove any occupants. All the outside crews can do is protect exposures and wait for the search to be completed".

The search for occupants was unsuccessful and the crew had to exit the structure as the rooms they were searching became involved in fire. Once the crews were out of the building firefighters used large diameter hose lines and a 1000 gallon per minute deck gun to begin extinguishment. Battalion Chief Campbell stated, "We came really close to losing



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the apartment complex too. I had to make a decision, put water on the fire and prevent it from spreading to the apartment complex or don't put water on the fire and exhaust all efforts for a search. I chose to exhaust our efforts on a search potentially losing the apartment complex. Our engine companies did a great job stopping the fire in the apartment complex; unfortunately we were not successful in saving the occupant but it wasn't for lack of trying. The search team put their lives on the line as they tried to save a life. It's hard on our firefighters knowing they were not able to save the occupant". The fire resulted in the death of one occupant. Mr. Stephen McGeary was discovered inside of the building and preliminary results indicate he was trying to extinguish the fire.



Once firefighters began extinguishment of the main fire building it took them approximately one hour to contain the fire and approximately six hours to complete extinguishment. More than 27 firefighters were called to the scene with mutual aid support coming from; Humboldt Bay Fire, Blue Lake Fire, Fieldbrook Fire, CALFIRE, Loleta Fire and Arcata Mad-River Ambulance. The Arcata Police Department, Red Cross and Salvation Army provided logistical support to the firefighters who battled the blaze. The fire occurred on one of the coldest nights of the year with temperatures dropping below 28 Degrees Fahrenheit. Crews fought fatigue and hypothermia as their wet gear began to freeze but thanks to Arcata Police's Mobile Command Unit crews were able to rotate through rehab and warm up in the Mobile Command Unit.

After the fire was extinguished a task force consisting of the Humboldt County Coroner's Office, Arcata Police Department and Arcata Fire was formed to begin an investigation of the incident. Chief Campbell reports, "At this time the fire is being ruled as an accidental fire. It appears to have started in the kitchen and dining room area. There is no indication of foul play or criminal activity. We are working closely with Arcata Police and the Coroner's Office to determine the exact cause".



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Damage to contents of the main fire building is estimated at \$137,631. Damage to the main fire building property is estimated at \$183,508. Damage to the contents of the apartment complex is estimated at \$5,057 with value save at \$505,697. Damage to the property at the apartment complex is estimated at \$6,743 with value saved at \$674,263.

Chief Campbell reports, "This was a tragic incident that resulted in the loss of a life. We hope that others will reflect on this incident and review their own fire safety measures to ensure that they protect their families and homes as we approach the upcoming Holidays. Make sure your smoke alarms work, you have a fire escape plan and you practice fire safety throughout the year. If you want information on things to do to make sure your home is fire safe please contact your local fire department".

Questions regarding this incident can be directed to Battalion Chief Campbell at 707-825-2000.

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