



CITY OF FERNDALE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Roger Schmidt
Fire Chief

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Fire Marshal

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Ferndale, MI

House Fire – Mom and two daughters narrowly escape after smoke alarm activates.

At 1:45 AM Ferndale Firefighters responded to a house fire in the 1700 block of Academy. Upon arrival they find all three occupants have escaped. Two children are injured and mom suffers from smoke inhalation. The family dog and cat perished in the fire that caused approximately \$30,000 in damages. The home is a one story, three bedroom ranch built in the 1960's. The prelude to this family's tragedy has many chapters that contribute to their successful escape.

Mom and her 7 and 14 year old daughters have lived in the home since 2003. The kids go to Royal Oak Michigan Schools. Sometime last year the 7 year olds' class took a field trip to the new Safety City USA in Royal Oak. Safety City USA is a hazard house built in a strip mall owned by Beaumont Hospitals. Firefighter Carry Thompson of the Royal Oak Fire Department thought of the idea and with the cooperation of Beaumont Hospital he worked hard to make a dream come true. The lessons learned that day by the seven year old were quickly brought home. She insisted that her mother buy and install a smoke alarm in the home. The family talked about fire safety and actually practiced a fire drill. They did not realize that the lessons learned by a seven year old would soon save their lives.

A carelessly discarded cigarette smoldered in a living room couch after the family went to bed at approximately 11:30 PM. At approximately 01:30 AM (give or take a few minutes) mom was awakened by the hallway smoke alarm. As she entered the hallway she could see the flames in the living room. Black smoke was already filling the hallway. She quickly woke her two daughters and because their escape to the front or back doors was blocked by the fire and smoke, they went back into the bedrooms to exit a window. Mom went into her room to fetch a telephone, while the two girls went into the 14 year olds' room. The 14 year old stated that when she opened her bedroom window she heard what sounded like a tornado outside. The bedroom suddenly became very hot and both her and her 7 year old sister leaped out the window head first. Mom also realizing the build up of heat and the smoke so thick that she could not see any longer, also leaped from the window head first. The 7 year old received minor burns from the hot window frame and the 14 year old received 2nd degree burns after she attempted to pull out the family dog. Mom was treated at the scene for smoke inhalation. The two girls were treated at Children's Hospital in Detroit Michigan where the 7 year old was released and her sister was admitted.

Lessons to be learned from this story:

1. Fire Safe Cigarettes. NFPA and other organizations are calling for all cigarette manufacturers produce a self-extinguishing cigarettes.
2. Install both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms on each level of your home and outside the sleeping areas.
3. Know your escape plan, and most importantly practice a fire drill
4. Always sleep with the bedroom doors closed
5. Stay low in smoke
6. And once the alarm activates, wake everyone up and quickly escape.



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7. Do not smoke in the home. If you do, have large ashtrays on a firm surface and empty them nightly before going to bed into a metal container with a lid and placed outside the home.
8. Never re-enter the home, not even for pets.
9. Call the fire department from a neighbors house
10. Have a meeting location outside the home.

The successful outcome in this case is the fact that the family had prepared itself and knew what to do. Had they hesitated as little as 30 seconds, they would have all perished. Smoke detectors save lives, but we must also prepare ourselves and practice fire safe behaviors and fire drills. The only other fire protection device to increase safety is the installation of a home sprinkler system. With smoke detection and home sprinklers the chances of survival in fire increases 85%.

As tragic as this fire was, the outcome could have been much worse. The dedication of fire safety professionals like Carry Thompson of the Royal Oak fire Department and other organizations such as Beaumont Hospital provides the education for all of us to be better prepared. It is up to each parent and child to install smoke detectors, plan their escape and practice fire drills.

Respectfully,

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