

State Fire Marshal's Office & Portland Fire Department Release Cause & Origin of Noyes Street Fire

PORTLAND, Maine – The Maine State Fire Marshal's Office and the Portland Fire Department today released the cause and origin of the fatal Noyes Street fire that occurred on November 1, 2014 and killed six people. The cause of the fire has been determined to be accidental in nature as the result of an improperly discarded smoking material. The fire originated in a smoking receptacle (see attached picture for example) which was placed on the front porch. The smoking receptacle was improperly utilized, placed on a combustible wooden floor, and next to combustibles which included recycling containers and furniture. The State Fire Marshal's Office worked in conjunction with the Portland Fire Department and Portland Police Department on the investigation. Scientific testing and fire modeling conducted by the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) supports the conclusion of the investigators.

Because of the location of the fire and the time of day, the fire grew in intensity undetected. At the time the fire was discovered, the main entrance door to the residence and the porch were engulfed in flames rendering that exit unpassable. This was further exacerbated by the fact that there were no working smoke detectors for early warning.

While the actual cause is not criminal, the full report is being forwarded to the District Attorney's office for review. Because of this, the full report is not being made available to the public at this time. Once the DA's office is able to make a conclusion, the report will be made available.

In the wake of this tragic fire, the City of Portland established a task force to review its inspections programs. The first phase consisted of an internal review of city codes and ordinances by City staff. The second phase, which is currently underway and consists of representation of landlords and tenants, has the task force members weighing all options that the City, landlords, and tenants can do in order to provide safe housing for Portland residents.

Thus far, the Task Force has discussed the following ideas:

- the creation of one office that houses both fire prevention inspectors and code enforcement inspectors;
- an improved centralized database to track complaints and inspections, which the public could access online to view property information;
- a proactive inspections program vs. an enhanced complaint-driven

- program
- increased enforcement policies

Task Force member Keith Gautreau, newly named Acting Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention & Community Outreach for the Portland Fire Department, has also stressed the importance of an educational campaign on fire safety and prevention methods that would specifically reach college students and young professionals who live in rental units.

The task force will draft final recommendations, which will be shared by the Acting City Manager with Neighborhood Association representatives for comment, and then forwarded to the Public Safety, Health and Human Services Committee for consideration and discussion at its regular meeting on February 10, 2015. The task force will also hold a public hearing on February 3, 2015 in which the public can attend and share feedback.

Given the severity of this incident, the City has also been working to gain access to inspect the other rental properties owned by Gregory Nisbet, the landlord of the 20 Noyes Street property. After conversations with the landlord proved unsuccessful, the City was able to obtain an inspection warrant on January 20, 2015 in order to inspect 186-188 Dartmouth Street and 124 Noyes Street. Those inspections occurred on January 20 and the City is currently evaluating the violations and necessary enforcement actions.

The City also established a dedicated phone and email for anyone who has fire safety questions or concerns that they'd like to talk about. Citizens are urged to call Fire Prevention officials at 207.482.LIFE or email life@portlandmaine.gov.