

Five children killed in Florida house fire

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A space heater is the likely cause of a house fire that took the lives of five children Monday night in the small town of Citra, Florida, near Ocala. The mother and grandmother of the children, who both were in the house and managed to escape through windows, reportedly told authorities a space heater was the possible cause of the fire.

Eight people were sleeping in the Jordan family house when the fire started late Monday night. Kyla Cole, the 21-year-old aunt of the children, was awakened by the blaze and woke up the other adults in the house, mother Krista Jordan and grandmother Linda Cole.

Neighbors broke windows in an effort to get everyone out.

In addition to the three adults in the house, the two sisters, Trinity, 6, and Cheyenne, 12, were pulled out of the house through windows and rushed to the hospital, where they succumbed from cardiac arrest.

The three brothers, Joseph, 15, Austin, 13, and William Jr., 8, died in the house. Their bodies were recovered after the blaze was extinguished. Apparently, the fire on the side of the house the boys were in was so advanced that neighbors and relatives couldn't access the boys to rescue them.

Krista Jordan, the mother of the children, works as a manager of a fast-food restaurant and reportedly worked long hours to provide for her family.

Citra is a small semi-rural community in Marion County. The neighborhood where the fire took place consists of wood-frame houses and trailer homes. The 7-8,000 population in Citra are 80 percent white. The poverty rate is 19 percent and 63 percent subsist on an annual income less than \$35,000.

While the cause of the blaze hasn't been officially announced, a space heater was discovered in the remains of the house and the night of the fire was cold enough for the family to be using it. Temperatures had

dropped to the mid-forties.

Space heaters are used widely in South Florida during cold snaps. Retail stores report runs on the devices during the onset of cold weather. The Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue website reports that though temperatures are higher in the South, the onset of cold weather leaves residents more vulnerable, because they are less prepared for it than people in colder climates.

Most house fires in the area, it is reported by Fire Rescue, are related to the improper use of space heaters. Nationwide, between 2003 and 2007, 72 percent of fire deaths were related to the use of space heaters. The risk of death from space heaters is 18 to 25 times higher than the risk from central heating systems. (See "Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue fire: Utility Shutoffs and the social crisis in Detroit: Findings of the Commission" .)

Just last week, the state's largest utility, Florida Power & Light posted a profit of \$308 million, an increase of 0.7 percent over the third quarter last year. Florida Power & Light's parent company, NextEra Energy, reported an annual profit to the end of the third quarter of \$720 million, an increase of 35 percent over its \$533 million in profit last year. There is currently a conflict in the state legislature over changes in law to allow Florida utilities to drastically increase rates over the next two years.



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