

Six die in Baltimore fire

David Walsh
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Three children and three adults died in a house fire in east Baltimore early Tuesday morning. Firefighters were alerted around 4:45 a.m. and arrived some minutes later to find a two-story rowhouse on the 2300 block of Homewood Avenue ablaze.

The weather conditions—sub-freezing temperatures and winds of up to 40 miles per hour—hampered fire-fighting efforts. Fire personnel initially entered the building, but wind gusts that were spreading the blaze from one dwelling to another forced their evacuation and obliged firefighters to battle it from the outside.

After the fire was suppressed, search and rescue crews re-entered the home and found the bodies of the six deceased. Three homes were affected by the fire and 30 people displaced. It is not known whether the buildings had working smoke alarms.

A *Baltimore Sun* reporter spoke to a neighbor, Shirley Braxton, who believed the fire started in the house next to hers. “That’s where my neighbors live and nobody came out,” she said. Braxton had known her neighbors for more than 20 years. “They were a very nice couple, a sweet couple,” who had children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Braxton told the newspaper.

According to the *Sun*, the individuals who died were Eleanor and Richard Satterfield, along with their granddaughter, Tiara Gholston, 26, and her three children, Amari, 9, Darryon, 3, and Daelyn, 1. All of them apparently lived in the rowhouse.

Of Mrs. Satterfield, neighbor Charles Giddins told the Associated Press, “She had just retired from working at the daycare program. All she would do is sit on the porch in the morning and feed the birds, and watch her grandkids.”

Grieving relatives arrived early in the morning. A reporter for WBAL-TV on the scene recounted hearing “gut-wrenching” and “heart-rending” screams from some of the family members who arrived at the Homewood address.

The fire is one of the most tragic in Baltimore in recent years. On January 20, 2010 four people were killed in a fire on East Oliver Street. The Homewood blaze occurred only a few blocks away from one of the deadliest house fires in Baltimore history: six members of an extended family, including three children, were killed in an early-morning fire on Cecil Avenue in May 2007. (See “Poverty, dilapidated housing behind rash of deadly fires in US cities”) The Baltimore fire department has faced a series of multiple-alarm fires in little more than a week.

At least 66 people have died in fires in Maryland in 2010; the state has a higher-than-average fire death rate. Eighteen people have died in Baltimore so far, one less than the 2009 total. Some 2,600 people die each year in house fires in the US, many of them attempting to heat their dwellings.

In rural Maryland on December 12, two adults and two children died in a fire in an 8-by-16-foot camper. The camper was enclosed by a wood-frame structure “intended as additional living space,” according to the *Washington Post*.

In Pikesville, Maryland, just northwest of Baltimore, two residents of a two-story house died of carbon monoxide poisoning on December 13. The bodies of the two men, Enael Lemus and Nelvin Salgado, both construction workers, were found in the basement, where they lived. Officials suggested the carbon monoxide may have come from a faulty heating system. Eight other people lived in the 1,560-square-foot building and had to be treated at a local hospital.

East Baltimore, the location of Tuesday morning’s tragic fire, is a largely working class area, with high levels of poverty and unemployment. Many run-down and dilapidated buildings scar the area.

The official poverty rate in Baltimore as a whole is 20 percent, with nearly 30 percent of children and 41 percent of the unemployed living below the poverty

line. Baltimore has seen the elimination of more than 100,000 manufacturing jobs in the past few decades.

In fact, since 1970 the city has lost more 84 percent of its manufacturing jobs. Baltimore is the country's 15th poorest major city, in one of the most affluent states. Unemployment for black youth in particular already stands at Depression levels.



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