

Two-year-old boy dies in Detroit house fire

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On Wednesday evening, December 8, during a bitter cold snap, another horrific fire ripped through a home in an impoverished area of Detroit's east side, killing a two-year-old boy and severely injuring his grandmother and eight-year-old sister.

While the cause of the fire has not been determined, friends of the family reported that they had been living without heat due to a dysfunctional boiler, relying on the minimal warmth of a kitchen stove.

Killed in the Detroit fire was Zane Hail, who died from smoke and heat inhalation one day before his third birthday. His sister, Fiona Hail, is in critical condition at a local children's hospital and is reported to be fighting for her life. His grandmother, Geneva Sims, is also in critical condition at a local hospital and had been recovering from a stroke when the fire took place.

The mother of the children, Denise Hail, was not at home at the time of the fire. She returned home after the firefighters had arrived, but they would not let her into the home as they fought to rescue the children and her mother.

Rommell Cole, a friend of the mother, told reporters that he knew the family well and had been to the home Wednesday evening to give them a Christmas tree. Cole said the mother had been struggling financially before the fire took place and wanted to purchase a gift for Zane for his birthday but didn't have the money.

Cole told the media the house was frigid when he went there. "She mentioned that her boiler had went out and she was calling Sears and the (Michigan) Department of Human Services to pay for a boiler," Cole told Detroit's Channel 4 news station. "But they were not forthcoming," he continued.

Cole said that he would come by from time to time to give Denise money to feed her children. Almost breaking down in tears, he said, "Often, she would not

eat until they ate," indicating the severity of the conditions facing the family.

Cole said Hail had tried to block off the kitchen area to maintain heat in the home, but was finding it difficult to keep the place warm.

Alvin, a neighbor of the Hails, gave the WSWWS a vivid account of what he saw the night of the fire. He said that at approximately 11 p.m. a passerby knocked on his door to tell him that his neighbor's house was on fire and that heavy smoke could be seen coming out of the windows.

"She was extremely upset and said the house nearby was burning," stated Alvin. "When I opened the door I could see the smoke on my porch was intense."

Alvin said he was surprised to see the fire because he had just come into the house a short time earlier after an attempt to install Christmas lights on the outside of his home.

"I put my coat on and came out to see what I could do," stated Alvin. "However, the smoke and fire were just too intense. But soon after I came out the fire department was already there because the lady had already called 911. So it didn't take long before they were up inside the house.

The firefighters threw off their helmets and immediately gave the children CPR. They tried everything they could to revive those kids," stated Alvin.

The mother of the children, Denise Hail, was not at home when the fire took place. Alvin said when she arrived she tried to go into the house but it was too smoky. "They brought her out and she fell to her knees beating the ground she was so upset," stated Alvin. Fire officials said the children were transported to Children's Hospital where the two-year-old was

pronounced dead.

Alvin said he and the woman waited outside where both of them prayed for the family because he knew it was bad. “I have played with that little boy, I knew the family. And you know, I had never seen that woman before in my life. But she probably saved all of our lives by knocking on our doors and calling 911.”

The area of this fire is in the vicinity of the former Packard Motors plant, long abandoned. The block of the house had only three or four houses standing, with the other side of the street completely empty. It is no doubt one of the areas of the city Democratic Mayor Dave Bing is planning to deprive of city services altogether in the name of “reshaping” the city. (See “Detroit mayor plans to end services to one-third of city ”)

Detroit Fire Department officials said the death of the two-year-old is the 39th fire-related death in Detroit so far this year. Lack of heat in the frigid Michigan winters has been a major factor in these deaths, primarily due to utility shutoffs. Since the beginning of the year, at least 11 people have died in Detroit after their utilities had been shut off by DTE Energy, including the three children of Sylvia Young on March 2.

The danger of house fires has grown substantially as families are struggling to make ends meet and the winter season takes hold. In Bucyrus, Ohio, three children aged three, six and seven died in a fire in a mobile home Thursday evening. An older brother, 15, was watching the young children as the mother, the sole breadwinner, worked. The surrounding county of Crawford has a poverty rate of 12.6 percent, with 20.4 percent of children considered poor.



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