

Fire kills five family members in the Seattle, Washington area

Hector Cordon
3 January 2011

An early morning, two-alarm fire swept through several apartment units on New Year's Day, killing four children and their father in Redmond, Washington. The mother of the children managed to escape with some injuries, but could only stand outside and watch in horror while flames engulfed her family's first-floor apartment and the two units above it.

Neighbor Jared Wilson, who lives on the building's third floor, told the Associated Press that the 30-year-old woman "couldn't speak—she was just hysterically screaming."

The child victims of the tragedy, all boys, ranged in age from 3 to 11 years old. Their father had been working odd jobs, including maintenance work for the apartment building's management company, Pan Pacific Properties. According to a KING 5 television station interview with some friends, the family had moved "from Colorado about a year-and-a-half ago to get a 'fresh start,' after their family business had gone under."

The apartment complex, located some 20 miles from downtown Seattle and two miles from software giant Microsoft's campus, did not have a sprinkler system. A representative of the Sammamish Ridge Apartments stated that each unit had a smoke detector. Investigators began working Sunday morning to determine the cause of the blaze.

Firefighters' efforts were hampered by the freezing weather, as well as the location of the apartment building, at the top of a hill accessed by a steep, iced-over driveway. It took several hours before the fire was brought under control, drawing firefighters from numerous communities.

All the apartments were evacuated in the 12-unit building and residents forced to find emergency shelter. Access to the building is currently barred as

investigators are using accelerant-sniffing dogs and receiving help from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to comb the debris. Police state that there is no evidence of arson at this point.

According to media reports, despite the parents' attempts to find better circumstances by moving to the Seattle area, they were still struggling financially. The children's father had had his hours cut back at the moving business where he worked. The mother previously worked for Mor Furniture but was currently unemployed. Last March they filed for bankruptcy protection in the Seattle courts.

The apartments in the 96-unit, eight-building complex—each of which, according to the complex's web site, has two bedrooms and rents for between \$1090 and \$1290 a month—lack fire sprinklers because they were constructed in the mid-1980s, before sprinklers were mandated. The lack of such a simple and effective fire-suppression device results in many tragic deaths.

According to the *Seattle Times*, "The victims' identities have not been disclosed, pending their release by the King County Medical Examiner's Office. 'This was horrific,' said Chris Champoux, who lives in a building across from the unit that burned. 'What will haunt me forever is the mother's screams for her children.'"

Last June another apartment fire, described as the worst in the city in terms of fire fatalities in four decades, took the lives of five family members in Seattle's Fremont neighborhood. Four children and a young woman—from 5 to 22 years old—died in that blaze.

Neighbors in that case criticized the tardiness of the fire department, as well as its disorganization. The first unit to arrive was unable to pump any water, while the

second unit had lost a hose in transit and stopped to recover it. There was, needless to say, no sprinkler in the apartment.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact