

Details of Seattle, Washington area fire deaths released

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The cause of the tragic deaths of five family members in an apartment fire in the Seattle area New Year's Day was identified as smoke inhalation Wednesday by the King County Medical Examiner's Office.

A fast spreading fire in the Sammamish Ridge Apartments in Redmond, Washington took the lives of David Wayne Thompson, 32, along with his sons, who were identified as Tristan, 12; David Jr., 6; Leviticus, 5; and Wyatt, 3.

The lone survivor, Lilly Reasor, 31, Thompson's wife and the biological mother of the three younger boys, managed to escape the fire with minor injuries. Neighbors and firefighters had to restrain the distraught woman from reentering the blazing apartment after she realized that her family was still inside.

The fire quickly consumed the old building materials and engulfed two apartments. One neighbor smashed in a window but, according to the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, "he was forced back by a blinding gusher of black smoke."

Reasor was released from Evergreen Hospital Medical Center late Monday evening after treatment for smoke inhalation and other injuries.

Investigators had finished collecting evidence from the fire scene Monday and sent it to the State Patrol Crime Lab for analysis. The fire's cause has yet to be determined and it may be some time before forensic tests can pin down its origin.

One possible cause of the fire may have been a gas leak. The mother of David Thompson's eldest son told the *Post Intelligencer* that during a phone conversation just hours before the fire, Thompson had commented that a pervasive smell of gas had filled the apartment.

Thompson and his wife had moved their family from Colorado a year and a half ago after his moving business in Colorado Springs failed and they lost their

house. Their attempts to reestablish themselves in Washington were fraught with difficulties. Thompson's hours at a moving company were cut back while his wife, who had worked at Mor Furniture, was currently unemployed. They were forced to file for bankruptcy in the Seattle courts last March.

Neighbors, friends and acquaintances have described the parents of the boys as caring and attentive. According to *Seattlepi.com*, apartment manager "Theresa Lunsford says that Thompson was an excellent father who spent every moment he could with his four sons. She said he was well respected by everyone at the apartment complex, where he worked as a maintenance assistant."

"We loved this family," she said. "The boys were wonderful—they were so sweet...They were happy boys, well-mannered boy. They smiled, they played, they laughed."

An unnamed law enforcement source quoted in the *Seattle Times* insinuated that smoldering ashes from a cigarette or marijuana smoked by the parents caused the fire. Of David Thompson, Lunsford noted that he was well aware of fire safety: "I know that David had just passed the fire department testing to become a firefighter, so you tell me if he could do that while he's ready to enter the fire department. That doesn't mesh with me."

The allegation is a transparent attempt to shift the blame for the fire deaths away from the apartment's lack of automatic fire sprinklers or local building codes and onto the victims themselves. The apartment buildings' construction in the mid-1980s preceded the passage of a law requiring sprinklers in new apartment developments.

Sprinklers are widely recognized as a simple technology that is highly effective in preventing fires.

However, according to MYNorthwest.com, “Attempts to require existing apartments to put in sprinkler systems in have routinely been shot down. Builders say they cost double or triple to install in existing units from what they cost in new construction.”

In 2008, smoking related fires killed 680 people in the US, while causing 1,520 injuries and \$737 billion in property damage. These types of fires are the leading cause of home fire deaths. In 2007 over 140,000 smoking related fires occurred in the US.

According to *Georgetown Times*, in an apartment complex in Pawley, South Carolina, just a few hours prior to the Redmond fire, a kitchen fire that started when cooking oil ignited and spilled was promptly contained by a residential sprinkler, thus preventing a possible conflagration and loss of life.

The subordination of housing, a truly fundamental necessity, to capitalism’s demand to maximize profit by evading costs it deems unnecessary—such as sprinklers—is what leads, all too tragically and all too often, to needless deaths. This is the major contributing factor in the deaths of David Wayne Thompson and his sons.



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