

House fires kill 11 in US south

Matthew MacEgan
12 January 2013

The past two weeks have seen a host of residential fires across the country resulting in multiple deaths, including many children.

Most vulnerable to fires are poor families, who often live in substandard housing, may not have smoke detectors, and are compelled to use cheaper, unsafe heating methods. Many accidental fires are caused by space heaters and electrical cords that are used when electricity or heat is shut off by major utility companies.

Four children, including an infant, are dead in the wake of a house fire outside of Atlanta late Tuesday night. A fifth child was thrown to safety by his mother from the second-story window of the family's duplex in Conyers.

Seven people were in the home when the fire started: a grandmother, the mother, and her five children aged nine, seven, six, and three years, and seven months old. The mother was in serious condition at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta with second- and third-degree burns on her arms and back. The surviving child, who is six years old, is being treated at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta in Egleston. His injuries are not life-threatening.

An 18-year-old neighbor, Lamonta Stroud, told reporters that he rushed to the duplex and began smashing windows in order to help the children to escape. "Come to the bathroom, I can get you all out!" he pleaded. He said that a little girl was at a window but would not jump, likely due to fear.

Officers arrived on the scene quickly after the fire was reported at 11 p.m. and tried without success to put out the flames with hand-held fire extinguishers, Conyers police chief Gene Wilson reported. The home was engulfed in flames when they arrived on the scene. One crew went upstairs to extinguish the fire while another retrieved the children and tried to revive them.

Glenn Allen, spokesman for Georgia's fire

commissioner, said there is no indication of what caused the blaze. Officials say that the fire appears to have started in the bathroom and hallway of the second floor of the home.

Stroud said that he knew the family well and that one of the girls who died was his sister's best friend. "All the kids out here are like family, and it hurts us all when we see something like this happen," Stroud said. "It's like my brothers and sisters are gone now."

Early Wednesday morning, in Jonancy, Kentucky, a father and four children perished in another house fire. They were survived by the mother, who suffered serious burns while trying to rescue her children.

The five bodies were found in the small home's living room, where the family had been sleeping near an electric space heater. The family had recently switched from burning wood to the electric heater, which was the only source of heat in the living room where the family slept together. The children were aged five, four, and two years, and six months old.

A relative who lives nearby said she awoke early Wednesday to find the house engulfed. "I got second-degree burns just getting close to it," said the children's great-aunt. James, the children's grandfather, woke to his daughter beating on the window of his home, screaming, "Help, Daddy, help! I need help getting the babies out of the house!" James rushed to the house but was unable to get inside.

All of the victims were found within two feet of each other, indicating that they may have been overcome by smoke. Fire investigators stated that the blaze was accidental and broke out in the room where the space heater was found.

An overnight fire in Dothan, Alabama, on Monday night also claimed the lives of two children and injured three adults. The children were four and one year old. The three injured adults still remain hospitalized.

Officials say that when crews arrived on the scene,

they found several people trapped inside the already engulfed home. The Alabama State Fire Marshal's office, along with city and federal authorities, are investigating the fatal blaze. The investigation is going slowly due to the witnesses being the victims. They have not been able to speak to two of the victims due to their conditions.

In Edinburg, Texas, three children died in a mobile home fire on the morning of Sunday, December 30. Four people were able to make it out of the trailer, including three adults and a seven-year-old boy. The ages of the deceased children were three and one, and 15 days old.

One of the survivors, the children's grandmother, Evangelina, who lived in a second trailer that also burned because it was attached to the mobile home containing the children, was sleeping when the fire broke out.

She stated that her husband sprinted into action, trying to get everyone out. They were able to drag her son and his wife out of the home but could not reach the children due to the intense flames and smoke. Gas tanks kept close to the home forced the survivors to move away until authorities arrived.

"Honey! The kids! The kids!" Evangelina shouted. Her husband responded, "My love, there's nothing else I can do. I can't get them out." Evangelina told reporters, "The memories of having loved them with all my heart because they were my chiquitos remain." Officials are investigating the cause of the blaze.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)