

Eight children dead in fires in the US south

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Two devastating house fires claimed the lives of nine people, including eight children, in the US south last week.

A mother and four children were killed in a house fire in Newnan, Georgia, early Saturday morning. Police and fire officials responded to a call in the pre-dawn hours stating that the home of Alonna McCrary, 27, was ablaze. The cause was said to be a faulty breaker in one of the home's electrical panels.

Police arrived at the home at around 1:17 a.m. to find the residence completely engulfed in flames. "The house was fully involved by the time we arrived," stated Stephen Brown, the Newnan Fire Department's battalion chief. Those killed in the fire were Alonna and four children: Eriel McCrary (5 years old), Messiaay McCrary (3), Nikiay McCrary (2) and McKenzie Florence (1). Nautica McCrary, 11, survived the blaze after being told by her mother to run; she was taken to the hospital due to smoke inhalation. All of the victims were related.

McCrary died while trying to rescue the remaining four children. "They had to feel around and she was hollering and screaming. Her mother kept telling her to get out," Roxanne Arnold told reporters. Arnold identified herself as the aunt of Nautica McCrary, the surviving 11-year-old. "She just insisted she wasn't going to let them babies go.... That's what I applaud her for. She was risking her own life to get the babies." A smoke detector had been found on the premises, but none could say if it had gone off to alert the family.

Reportedly, McCrary had reported electrical problems to her landlord a few days prior to the fire, which brought the landlord to the property on both Thursday and Friday, but without any sufficient solution to the problem.

Nearly half of all reported domestic fires in the United States, or more than 26,000, are caused by electrical problems. Complications due to poorly

installed wiring or overuse of circuit breakers can cause tragedies to occur.

Newnan is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Atlanta, Georgia. Since the year 2000, the city has undergone a rapid population growth, doubling in size from just above 16,000 in the baseline year to more than 33,000 as of 2010. This has largely been fed by a growth in the city's commercial hubs, including shopping malls and department stores.

Over the same period, poverty has deepened. The town is 42 percent African-American, with a poverty level of 36 percent. Those classified as living in "deep poverty," or at 50 percent of the state's minimal income level for a family of four, stood at roughly 14 percent. Both of these poverty figures were nearly double the average of the state itself.

On April 25, a mobile home fire near Hartsville, South Carolina, also claimed the lives of four children, leaving their surviving mother childless. In this case, Hope Hawkins, the 21-year-old mother, is facing four counts each of homicide by child abuse and unlawful conduct toward a child. Hawkins could face life in prison if she is convicted.

A neighbor told SCNOW.com that she was alerted to the fire when she heard a loud boom from inside her own house. There were already flames shooting through the window by the time she got to the mobile home, and she and another neighbor unsuccessfully fought the flames with a garden hose while they called 911. Firefighters received a call at 1:53 p.m., arrived at the address four minutes later, and extinguished the flames in about 10 minutes.

Reportedly, Hawkins was not home when firefighters arrived but only showed up moments after the blaze was put out. Perishing in the fire were twin 10-month-old sisters Myasia and Kynasia, 2-year-old Cameron, and 4-year-old Delonta. Authorities say smoke inhalation killed the children who were found gathered

in a bedroom.

Hawkins was arrested on Friday evening and is being held without bond. She will be unable to attend her own children's funerals.



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