

Cold weather fires kill 10 children in Kentucky, Georgia

Matthew MacEgan
31 January 2014

The cold weather striking the eastern United States over the last week has brought with it a rash of fires, some of them lethal. Fires in Kentucky and Georgia are responsible for the deaths of 11 people, 10 of whom were children. Other fires across the country have caused severe injuries and the loss of entire homes.

Firefighters and police were called to a flame-engulfed house in Greenville, Kentucky, at 2:00 a.m. on Thursday morning, where two adults and nine children aged 4 to 15 resided. The 36-year-old father and one of the 11-year-old daughters managed to escape the blaze and were rushed to a hospital in Nashville with severe burns.

The bodies of the other nine occupants, which included a mother and eight children ranging in age from toddlers to teenagers, were recovered by the beginning of the afternoon. The immediate cause of the fire is not clear at this time. Temperatures were reported in the teens and single digits overnight. The house was completely destroyed, and aerial imagery shows blackened debris scattered across the surrounding area.

Simultaneously, firefighters were dispatched to a burning home in Savannah, Georgia, at 1:53 a.m. on Thursday morning, where a space heater fire caused the deaths of two children. As the firefighters arrived, smoke billowed out of the front of the house, and a second alarm was ordered to ensure that nearby homes were not affected. Flames destroyed the interior of the house and caused the roof to collapse.

According to fire department officials, the house had eight occupants, including six children. Only six of the eight were able to escape safely. This was the second fire in Savannah caused by a space heater within a 15-hour period. Another blaze was quickly put out Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. before it could consume an

entire house that contained two residents. Both were able to escape unscathed.

Several other fires have broken out across the country as cold weather has swept across the eastern US, including one in Saginaw, Michigan, at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon. Seven people had reportedly been inside the house at the time of the fire, helping the occupant to move. Fire officials have reported that the blaze likely resulted from a space heater that was placed too near a box spring. The flaming mattress was extinguished in the front yard. The occupant told news reporters that she had previously experienced problems with electricity in the house. No one was injured.

A space heater placed too near a bed caused another fire in Smith County in eastern Texas at around the same time. Authorities were called to the scene at 1:00 p.m. Wednesday, where a mobile home occupied by a handicapped man burned to the ground. The man was not injured. A local fire marshal told reporters that space heater fires are common during this time of the year.

Another fire in Hull, Massachusetts, caused a man to suffer third-degree burns covering 35 percent of his body after he tried to fight a fire sparked inside a space heater in his home on Sunday. Firefighters spent five subsequent hours fighting the blaze, hampered by wind and cold weather. Reportedly, water sprayed from fire hoses turned to ice that encased the entire building, the ground, and their ladders. One firefighter sustained an injury due to slipping on the ice. The house was a total loss.

The widespread use of space heaters has caused more fires and deaths as cold weather has gripped the country. Many families who experience worsening living conditions bereft of basic utilities must turn to unconventional and potentially more dangerous ways

of keeping warm. Even those who have their utilities still in service opt to use space heaters in order to save money on heating costs throughout the winter months.

Concurrently, the federal government continues to make cuts to social programs including those that provide heating and energy assistance to impoverished families. Increasing numbers of families are seeing their utilities shut off for nonpayment by major energy companies, despite record lows and below-zero temperatures across the nation.



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