Home fires in the US kill 125 people in just two weeks

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Some 125 people in the United States died in fires during the 14 days from November 9 through November 22. At least 33 were senior citizens and 20 were children under 14 and another 33 are listed as their age unknown. This brings to over 2,050 the number of people killed in home fires so far this year, according to the US Fire Administration, which tracks press reports of fire deaths.

Deadly fires occurred in 31 states. Texas had the largest number of fire deaths with 10, followed by California and Oklahoma with 8 each. Seven people died in Illinois, Michigan, and New York. Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, and Ohio had 6 deaths each.

Fire deaths are on the rise as the cold weather sets in and people are forced to use unsafe space heaters to heat their homes. Older wiring that gets overloaded from electric space heaters is another factor. Many of the deaths occur in rental units in which even the most basic safety measure, a smoke detector, is missing, let alone fire doors and escape routes.

The single deadliest fire took place in New Orleans, Louisiana in which a family of five was killed on November 11, when their house burned down. Killed in the fire were three children, 7-year-old Jayla Anderson, and her brothers, 11-year-old Jason and 12-year-old Jade. Their mother Christina Squire, 33, and their grandmother Martha Anderson, 77, also died.

Firefighters have not determined the cause of the fire, which they believe began in the grandmother's bedroom. The grandmother was a smoker and she also had oxygen in the room which she needed for her health. As with a fire last month in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, which killed five family members, cuts in health care and the poor economy force extended families to live together and to provide medical assistance to invalids without having the proper support, training and safety equipment that would be found in any medical facility.

The house they lived in was severely damaged during Hurricane Katrina when the neighborhood flooded. The Andersons were one of the first families to return to the block. Teachers and children from the school across the street where the three children attended were devastated by the news.

In Caribou, Maine, a mother and her three children were killed on November 20, when a fire ripped through their mobile home. Killed in the fire were 28-year-old Norma Skidgel, her 3-year-old son, Trenton Delisle and her 2-year-old twins, Mason and Madison. This brings to 11 the number of people killed in home fires this month in Maine. Six people died in a house fire November 1 in Portland.

On November 13, in Syracuse, New York three people were killed when a house fire swept through their two story wood frame house. Killed were Margaret Settles, 64; her daughter, Santique Settles, 38; and her 4-month-old grandson, Marvon Gunn. Shantique Settles' 3-year-old grandson, Shamir Spencer Tape, was pulled from the house by firefighters, but after breathing in so much soot, is in critical condition on a breathing machine. Four other relatives who were living in the house were able to escape with less serious injuries.

Two children, a 3-year-old girl and a 9-year-old boy, died on November 9 when the mobile home they lived in caught fire in Scott Depot, West Virginia. A 7-year-old boy escaped with injuries and the babysitter who was caring for the children also got out. The mother was working at the time. Fire officials say the fire was caused by the 7-year-old playing with a lighter. Fires inside mobile homes can spread throughout the structure in less than two minutes.

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The causes of most of the fires are listed as under investigation. The US Fire Administration compiles this list from news accounts of the fires within one or two days of the fire. The agency does not update its database once the fire causes have been determined. There is little interest in official Washington in tracking or finding remedies for a social evil that takes as many lives as the 9/11 attacks every 18 months.

The large number of fire deaths is another example of the growing poverty and inequality in America. The continued claims by the Obama administration and the media that the economy is recovering are only a reality for the most wealthy. For the vast majority of the population the economic situation continues to decline.

Millions of families who lost their homes after the crisis hit in 2008 have often been forced to live in overcrowded and unsafe houses or mobile homes. Millions of younger families who never owned a home have also been kept from buying one because of the lack of decent-paying jobs. Meanwhile banks and investment firms are making millions buying up foreclosed properties and making a quick profit by turning them into substandard rental units.

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