

In the ten days before Christmas, 81 people killed in home fires throughout the US

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At least 81 people were killed in home fires throughout the United States in the ten days leading up to Christmas.

On Friday, an early morning fire in Fayette County Ohio, killed a grandmother and her three grandsons as they slept in their ranch style home. The three boys, ages 14, 11 and 9 were staying with their grandmother because they did not want her to be alone on Christmas. The cause of the blaze, which broke out around 4 am, is still under investigation. By the time fire fighters arrived the house was completely engulfed in flames.

Washington Court House, the small rural community of 14,000 where the fire occurred, is located about 40 miles southwest of the state capital Columbus, Ohio. Washington Court House has a very small fire department, with most of its firefighters working on an on call basis. Over 23 percent of the town's population lives below the poverty line, and the average household income is just \$32,196, or one third less than the statewide average.

Fire deaths are on the rise in the United States as the cold weather sets in and many families are forced to use unsafe electric or kerosene space heaters in an effort to save money.

In the 10 days leading up to the tragic fire in Ohio, over 81 people were killed in home fires throughout the country. South Carolina had 12 fire deaths, followed by Florida with seven deaths, while Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia each had four fire deaths.

Two of the South Carolina fires occurred on December 20, with one in Spartanburg County killing five people and the other in nearby Berea killing three.

The fire in Spartanburg broke out in a 40-year-old apartment building that was not equipped with fire barriers or a sprinkler system, despite requirements in

current building codes that all buildings be retrofitted with both fire safety systems.

Killed in the fire were two brothers ages six and eight from one family as well as a mother and her son age 10 and daughter age 19 from another family. At least 40 more were left homeless by the Spartanburg blaze.

Firefighters said the apartment building was burning from end to end when they arrived and they had to rescue many people from their apartments.

The second fire took place in nearby Berea, when a mobile home caught fire, killing two adults and their one-year-old baby. Four other children, two siblings and two cousins, were able to escape the blaze. A 14-year-old cousin was credited with saving two of the boys, aged six and four.

Mobile homes are considered to be the most dangerous homes, in which it can take only a few minutes for the entire structure to be engulfed in flames.

Both Spartanburg County and Berea are located in the north and western part of the state near the North Carolina and Georgia border. Spartanburg County has a poverty rate of 17.9 percent and the median household income is \$42,919, slightly below the state average.

Berea has a poverty rate of 31.8 percent and the median household income is just \$30,610, making it one of the most impoverished communities in the state. Its childhood poverty rate is nearly 53 percent, or every other child lives in a family that is living below the poverty level.

Fire deaths, while presented as random tragedies in the corporate media, are directly correlated to poorer housing and lower income. As such, they represent yet another expression of the grotesque social inequality produced by American capitalism.



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