

160 people killed in US home fires during first two weeks of January

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160 people throughout the United States have been killed in home fires during the first two weeks of the year. House and apartment fires increase in the winter time as many people are forced to turn to unsafe electric, wood or fuel space heaters.

People were killed in home fires in 39 of the 50 states. Texas, Pennsylvania and Ohio each saw 12 fire-related deaths. Ohio had the single deadliest fire on January 6, which killed five people from three generations while they were sleeping in a trailer home in the village of Sugar Grove.

Eleven people were killed in nine separate fires in Michigan. Seven people were killed in California, and six were killed in each of Louisiana, Missouri, and Virginia, while five were killed in each of Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oklahoma and Tennessee.

The Sugar Grove, Ohio fire took place in a small rural community outside Cincinnati. The fire was reported around four in the morning by neighbors who said they were awoken by an explosion and saw the sky lit up by the trailer on fire.

Thomas Taylor, 54, and Pamela Taylor, 43, their daughter, Patricia Taylor and her fiancé, Dylan Vanord, both 22, and their 10-month-old baby boy Cody Vanord were all killed in the fire.

The five extended family members were staying with Pamela's mother, Georganna Jennings, 62, and her partner Don Asbell, 63, who both escaped the fire. Georganna was hospitalized in critical condition with extensive burns.

The five had been moving from their home in McConnelsville, Ohio, to a new home in Lancaster, Ohio. They had been transporting their belongings in several trips and decided to spend the night with the great-grandmother rather than take the one hour and 20 minute drive, as a winter storm made travel risky.

Investigators have ruled out arson, but have not determined the cause of the fire. They have not ruled out a failure in either the electrical or heating systems. Nor have they determined if the explosion heard by neighbors had caused the fire, or itself was the result of the fire.

According to relatives, Georganna told them that she awoke to see her entire bedroom wall in flames and that she and her partner broke out a window to escape, which caused the entire structure to become engulfed in flames.

Firefighters were delayed in reaching the fire by the poor road conditions caused by the winter storm and the fact that the roads had not been plowed or salted. When they did arrive, there was little left for them to do.

There is no central database for the reporting of fire deaths in the United States and there could well have been more than the 160 reported by the US Fire Administration, a department of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The list of those killed is compiled by press reports and is never updated with the cause of the fire which sometimes takes from days to weeks to determine.

Twenty-three people have been killed in home fires in Ohio over the past month. This number includes 14 people killed in four multiple-death fires. In addition to the recent fire in Sugar Grove:

? Three children ages 7, 10 and 12 died when their house in southwestern Ohio burnt down on December 12.

? Two adult brothers were killed when their mobile-home caught fire in eastern Ohio on December 24.

? A grandmother and her three grandsons were killed in her home when it burnt down on December 26.

The danger of house fires is compounded by the

housing crisis confronting the working class and poor throughout the country.

In 2012, the homeownership rate fell for the 8th year in a row and now stands at just 65.4 percent. The homeownership rate is even lower for low-income workers and single parent families who find it very hard to afford a home and don't qualify for bank loans. States like Florida which were especially hard hit by the housing crisis now have their lowest homeownership rate in 30 years.

Furthermore, many of the banks and investment firms which were responsible for the collapse of the housing market in 2008 and the economic crisis that it unleashed have turned around and are buying massive blocks of homes which were foreclosed on and turning them into rental properties. (See: Financialization of rental market threatens future of home ownership in US)

Often only cosmetic, if any, repairs are made on the properties as investors make huge profits off of the rental income. As recent tragic fires in Syracuse, NY and McKeesport, PA demonstrated, dilapidated homes become death traps for those living in them, and the slumlords who own them are never held responsible by the authorities.



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