

Record cold weather in the US leads to spate of deadly house fires

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21 February 2015

Since December 21, the first day of winter, there have been 576 fatalities attributable to residential fires in the United States, according to the United States Fire Administration's website, which compiles media reports on US house fires. Of this total, 84 were children age 14 or younger, and 175 were senior citizens age 65 or older.

Texas, with 43 home fire fatalities, Ohio with 42, and Michigan with 35, have seen the highest number of deaths from residential fires.

In recent days, much of the eastern US has experienced records low temperatures in numerous cities, increasing the danger of house fires and other cold-related deaths. For working-class families, traditional home heating costs during this period of extreme cold have soared, forcing many to partially heat their homes with unsafe space heaters, or forgo heating altogether.

Cold weather has extended deep into the southern US. In Orange Park, Florida, a schoolteacher in her 60s was killed on Friday morning, when her house was engulfed in flames that began from a space heater. The house did not have smoke detectors.

A house fire in Knoxville, Tennessee early Thursday morning killed three people. James Overton, 73, Edith Overton, 63, and their disabled son Derek Overton, 47, were all killed by the fire, the cause of which has not been released. The fire has been designated as "weather-related," which means that the deceased were not the victims of foul play and that the fire was accidental, not intentional.

So far this winter, there have been 24 house fire fatalities in Tennessee alone.

On February 11, a mother and her three children died in a trailer house fire at the Gary Malone Trailer Park in South Point, Ohio. Ashley Mays, 25, her son, Elijah

Parker, 5, and her twin 11-month-old sons Anthony and Preston Walker passed away in the fire. The family lived with Ashley's girlfriend, Dorothy Walker, 32, and her 9-year-old son Hunter, who were not home when the fire broke out.

Mays' next-door neighbor, Ryan Luther, told the *Ironton Tribune*, "When I moved here, I was homeless. Ashley was very helpful. You could ask her for anything and she would do anything for anybody. It's devastating when something like this happens."

Investigators have found that the fire began in the center of the trailer, but have yet to determine a cause. According to the State Fire Marshal's Office in Ohio, there were no smoke alarms found inside the trailer.

Neighbor Rebecca Davis criticized the trailer park landlord's maintenance practices, telling local news station WOWK-TV, "It is possible that any of [the trailers] could go with the way he has them rigged up."

Ohio's Revised Code states that there is no "state-level" code requiring a single family's home to have detectors, nor are landlords legally obligated to install them.

On Thursday, February 12, a house fire in Mosinee, Wisconsin, killed siblings Neatha Carwile, 68, and Hershel "Fred" Bauman, 75. Autopsy reports indicate that both died from smoke inhalation. The smoke detectors in their apartment were not working at the time of the fire.

The two victims were found in the upstairs apartment of a duplex. It is unclear why the two were unable to escape, but police investigators have said that Bauman had physical limitations that could have made escaping difficult. His sister was caring for him at the time of their deaths.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation, but foul play is not suspected and authorities believe the

fire began in the couple's kitchen. Two adults and their grandchild, who live in the lower duplex, were able to get out safely.



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