

Two Detroit firefighters injured fighting blaze with low water pressure

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Two firefighters were injured early Wednesday morning while attempting to extinguish a fire on a block with insufficient water pressure. The fire began at 1:30AM at a four-unit flat apartment before spreading to a larger five-story apartment building. Both houses were vacant.

James Houseworth, Detroit's senior fire chief, said restoring water pressure took two hours. "We had problems getting water so that the house burned down to the ground, as you can see," he told a local news station. "It caught to the apartment building next door and because of the fact that we could not get water in a timely fashion, this is what happens."

Executive Fire Commissioner Edsel Jenkins told the *Detroit News* Firefighters were forced to wait more than an hour until a worker from the newly formed regional water board was called to the scene "to open a water gate in the ground to increase the volume of water to allow us to extinguish the fire."

Fire fighters scrambled as far as three blocks away in several directions looking for a hydrant with enough pressure to extinguish the flames. "They're stretching hoses from three blocks north and one block south and two blocks west," Resident Charlie Brown told CBS Detroit.

Detroit Water and Sewerage Department maintenance manager Kieyona Jackson told the *Detroit News*, "We have adequate pressure for the block, sufficient enough for one hydrant to be available for the fire," she said. "But once the fire got too big and they needed to put more apparatuses on it, they needed more water."

Two firefighters were hospitalized due to smoke inhalation as a result of the fire department's inability to contain the blaze. Houseworth told *Click on Detroit*, "This went south quick. The building was dark, it was hard to see. Things started falling, people got lost."

James Willis, a retired Chrysler worker, lives across the street from where the fire took place, separated by an open lot. "I saw it around 4 a.m. They had two extensions spraying the water and it looked like the flames were just eating up the water," he told the WSWS.

"The house next door burned so much that the bricks just crumbled. It just fell down." He said that, had either of the buildings been occupied, there certainly would have been one or more lives lost.

Alan Wingate lives across the street from the apartment building where the fire took place. Alan cuts the grass in the area to keep the neighborhood in shape. He even used his own money to put a fence around the apartment building to keep out looters. "We wanted to keep the neighborhood up," Wingate told the WSWS.

Referring to the use of infrastructure cuts to clear residents out of sections of the city, Wingate said, "The way these cuts are taking place it is like they are trying to move us out and revitalize the area for developers benefits, not those who are here." He continued: "We've been here for years and its wrong."

Wingate said the larger apartment was a beautiful building with art deco brickwork, and had gone through several foreclosures over the past few years. "This is the first fire I've seen here that has burnt like this."

"Look, the problem is the pipes underground are antiquated," said resident James Willis. "The piping needs to be replaced. The whole city is like that. They need to revamp the whole thing but it will take a lot of money. You probably have leaks all over the city which brings down the water pressure."

"There are probably leaks we don't even know about yet because they haven't come up to the surface," he said.

"And they have closed so many fire stations too,"

James added. “They had one right down the street here on Linwood. When they close them it takes longer to get out here.”

The Linwood station was closed as part of cuts carried out by former Mayor Dave Bing in 2013, in the name of staving off the imposition of an Emergency Manager or the city’s bankruptcy. Both measures were later imposed on the city with the agreement of Bing, a Democrat.

The Detroit fire department, which fights more than 9,000 building fires per year, is significantly understaffed, and massive budget cuts to the water system following the bankruptcy of Detroit in 2013-14 have cost hundreds of water and sewerage workers their jobs.



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