Cold snap brings fatal house fires to Detroit

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The recent plunge to below-freezing temperatures in the northern Midwest and northeast regions of the US brought with it three fatal house fires in Detroit alone since last Saturday.

The latest broke out around 1:30 a.m. Tuesday in an Eastside Detroit home, forcing inhabitants, mostly children, to jump out second-story windows to survive. Local news media initially reported that a three year-old boy, KJ, had died in the fire, but it was later reported that he is on life support at Detroit Receiving Hospital.

The entire family, including Shirley Love, her two daughters, her niece and her three children, ages 1, 3 and 4, have all been hospitalized. Shirley said when she could not reach the children, who were upstairs, from inside the house, she went outside around the side of the house telling those inside that they would have to jump.

Another resident of the home who wasn't there at the time, Montece Wilkerson, told TV reporters later that he could tell that the fire started from a downstairs space heater.

A house fire in Eastpointe, a eastern Detroit enclave, killed two women and injured three other occupants on Sunday, two days earlier. The women, 87-year-old Mary Ingram and 61-year-old Margaret Dunaway, were believed to be mother and daughter. Two men, ages 30 and 31, and a 4-year-old boy were treated for smoke inhalation.

That home was reported to have no smoke detectors installed.

The day before that, a 7-month-old girl identified as Michaela Walker, was killed in a Northwest Detroit house fire that started at 4:30 p.m. Five others, one adult and several children who were inside the home managed to get out of the burning house.

One of the children who escaped told reporters that he was in the basement when he heard screams saying to get out of the house. He said he thought the fire started in the kitchen.

Up until the recent cold snap, the winter had been somewhat mild. The drop in temperature that began over the weekend was attributed to an "Alberta Clipper," according to Weather.com. Starting from Alberta, Canada, a stream of cold air extends across the northern US, bringing winds and, in places downwind of the Great Lakes, lake-effect snowfall.

The drop in temperatures, while not unusual for Michigan winters, hits impoverished neighborhoods like those in Detroit especially hard. Many of the older homes are not properly insulated, have old furnaces and are inefficient in conserving heat. Owing to that, the use of electric space heaters as a primary source of warmth is widespread in poorer communities.

In 2011, space heaters were responsible for one-third of home heating fires and four out of five (81 percent) home heating fire deaths, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Most house fires occur in the months of December, January and February.

On Monday evening, a family of four was killed in an explosion in their Ohio home. The bodies of a couple and their two daughters, aged 8 and 12, were found in their Northfield Center Township home, about 20 miles south of Cleveland. The cause of the explosion is still being investigated.

In Chicago, seven firefighters were injured in a multi-alarm apartment building fire in the Rogers Park neighborhood in the early hours of Monday morning.

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