

Hundreds killed in US home fires

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Three hundred twenty-six people have been killed in home fires in the United States so far this fall as the heating season is just beginning. Of the 326 people who died, at least 55 are children and another 70 are senior citizens. Twenty-five people died in both Texas and Georgia and 21 in Pennsylvania.

With the weather turning cooler in the US, the heating season has begun. This is the time of year when preventable fatalities increase due to inadequate housing and heating conditions, which are forcing many to utilize space heaters to supplement heating, raising the risk of house fires.

At least 1,869 people have died as a result of fires this year alone. The figure is most likely higher, as there are likely many cases that never get reported in the media.

Statistics compiled from media reports by the United States Fire Administration (USFA) reveal the scale of the crisis. There have been several tragic multiple fatalities in house fires across the US. These largely preventable deaths expose the social inequality and dangerous housing conditions that exist for the working class despite the so-called economic recovery.

On November 21, four children, girls ages 11, 9, 7 and 5, died when the house they were living in caught fire in Carroll County, Indiana. The mother was pulled from the blaze with burns on her hands and face and suffering from smoke inhalation. Two police officers who tried to rescue the children were also hospitalized with smoke inhalation.

In the last week of October, there was a horrific increase in residential fires, in which 67 people were killed. In that week, there were 12 incidents in which 36 people lost their lives. Sixteen of the victims were under 14 years old.

Georgia has had 25 deaths since the beginning of the heating season. Twelve people were killed in fires on the weekend of October 22 and 23 alone.

In Trion, in the northwest corner of Georgia, a mobile

home fire took the lives of five family members and one relative visiting in a mobile home that caught fire around 11 p.m. on October 23. The victims were Brad Miron and Demi Jones, 29 and 22, and their three children, Clair, Lola, and Olivia Jones, who were aged 5, 3, and just 3 months old, respectively. A cousin staying overnight, Jada Kendrick, age 5, also perished.

Brad Miron had installed a wood stove in the trailer the day of fire, and it was determined to be the cause of the blaze. A family member told the local press, "Brad was going to make sure those babies were warm, and he had no other option, so he did what he thought was right to keep them warm and it cost them their lives."

There has been no confirmation that the home contained smoke or carbon monoxide detectors. Mobile homes are notorious death traps, where fire can engulf the entire home in just minutes.

The town of Trion is home to one of the largest textile factories in the world for denim, Mount Vernon Mills, which employs 1,700 workers. According to the US Census Bureau, the poverty rate in Trion for children under 18 years of age in 2014 was 29.4 percent, a nearly 8 percent increase over 2012.

Also that weekend, five people were killed in a home fire in Duluth, Georgia. Killed in the blaze were Kimberly Lewis, 45, David Waring, 45, Kelley Tomkinson, 47, Edward Brown, 21, and Danielle Waring, 19.

A mobile home fire in Kaplan, Louisiana, on October 23 killed a mother and two infants. Felicie Cloteaux, 22, was killed as she tried to save her friend's children, Rory and Arabella Hudson, just 3 and 4 years old.

At the time of the fire, there were six inside the home, with three escaping when they became aware of the fast-moving blaze in the mobile home early in the morning. The victims were believed to have succumbed to smoke inhalation and were found in the back bedroom of the home.

After a preliminary investigation, it is believed that the fire may have started from an electrical malfunction in the living room area. It was reported that there were no smoke or carbon monoxide detectors operational in the home.

In Amarillo, Texas, a fire on November 10 in a recreational vehicle killed a mother and her three children. The family was using the RV as a home because their nearby mobile home was not in fit condition to be occupied. The emergency call came at 5 p.m. from a neighbor who noticed smoke. The neighbors' attempts at rescue were repelled by thick smoke.

Killed in the blaze were Michelle Stone, 34, and her children Richard, Audrianna, and Keegan Stone, who were 8, 5, and 4, respectively. The victims are survived by Michelle's husband, Rick Stone, and two older children. The cause of the fire, and whether there were detectors of any kind in the RV, is unknown.

All of these deaths were preventable. With the colder weather and the high price of fuel, many working class and low-income families are forced to rely on unsafe space heaters or wood burners. The high cost of housing is also forcing many families into overcrowded and substandard housing, which are often firetraps. As winter approaches, these tragedies will only increase and claim more victims.



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