

Illinois house fire kills mother and her four children

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Grace Espinosa, 1; Allizon V. Espinosa, 3; Genesis A. Espinosa, 5; and Renata P. Espinosa, 6; and their mother, Cythaly Zamodio, 25, perished from a house fire in Des Plaines, Illinois, a northern suburb of Chicago on Wednesday, January 27.

The fire originated at the top of the stairs of the second-floor unit, creating a wall of fire to the only entry and exit to the unit, blocking the mother and her four daughters' only escape.

Firefighters were able to pull the four sisters from the home but they later died at the hospital. The mother died at home. The father was at work at the time of the fire.

Des Plaines spokeswoman Jennie Vana said initial findings do not point to foul play.

The 104-year-old home was divided into four apartments. According to Vana, it had a "long history" of property maintenance code enforcement violations. The property owner, Manuel Espinoza, was previously issued a violation for operating a landscaping business from the house, breaking zoning laws. At the time of the fire, there were no working smoke alarms on the second floor, the site of the fire.

A GoFundMe, created by the family's cousin Violeta Gomez-Garcia, has been set up to help the family with burial expenses and other costs. As of publication, the fund appeal has raised nearly \$80,000 out of a \$100,000 goal.

Gomez-Garcia, a cousin of Juan Manuel Espinosa Serrato, father of the children and husband to Zamodio, told Patch.com, "My cousin is devastated with this tragedy. They were born in Mexico. About a year ago, she and the girls received their residency and began their life in the U.S. Her family (Zamodio's mom, dad and sibling) reside in Mexico. We are looking for help so they can come for their funeral. They don't have

passports, or visas, to travel into the states and we need help finding a way for them to come in time for the funeral."

Des Plaines Fire Chief Daniel Anderson said during a press conference, "I've been doing this for 30-some-odd years, and this is the worst day I've ever had."

Tragically, similar fires broke out in Wisconsin last week. On Saturday, January 23, three separate house fires occurred resulting in five deaths. Of the five dead, three were children.

While the investigation is ongoing, investigators have ruled the likely cause of the Des Plaines fire tragedy to be a space heater, a common cause of many fires and deaths across the United States every winter.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), home heating fires averaged 48,530 a year from 2014 to 2018. From these fires, approximately 500 people died, while 1,350 were injured and property damages reached \$1.1 billion

A study published by the NFPA in 2018 found heating equipment to be the second-leading cause of home fires in the US and the third-leading cause of home fire deaths. The report states that, "More than half (53 percent) of all home heating fire deaths resulted from fires that began when heating equipment was too close to things that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattresses or bedding."

It is not known exactly what occurred in the home before the fire broke out. For one, being a mother caring for her children, let alone four as in the case of the Des Plaines fire, is extremely exhausting. Caring for children no doubt creates the possibilities for oversight, accidents, or the unnoticed movement of a space heater to a dangerous location by a child.

But such accidents only reflect the tragic outcome of a manifold of factors and processes. Placing this

horrific tragedy in its social context and adding it to the list of fires and deaths attributed to space heaters, it is no longer an accident but becomes an alarming and repetitive symptom of a deeper cause.

It speaks directly to the social conditions of the working class. Workers who cannot afford modern homes, or rent places that offer basic commodities such as centralized heating, are forced to take other measures to keep themselves and their families warm in the winter months.

“Clearly, the coldest months of the year is [sic] when we see the largest share of home heating fires,” said Lorraine Carli, vice president of Outreach and Advocacy at NFPA.

To keep themselves warm, alternative and unsafe means are used, such as space heaters. The final real cause of the needless deaths is not the accidental placement of a space heater in a dangerous location, thus causing a fire, but the growing levels of social inequality that forces workers to live in unsafe conditions in the first place.

While millions of workers find themselves living in unsafe housing since the coronavirus pandemic began in March, the wealth of America’s billionaires has grown by more than \$1 trillion, feeding off the rise in the stock markets due to bailouts given to corporations. In Illinois, billionaires did not miss out on this mind-boggling growth in wealth. Ken Griffin; Thomas, Penny and J.B. Pritzker; Sam Zell; Mark Walter; Joseph Grendys; Steven Sarowitz; and Joe Mansueto all saw their wealth rise, as over 430,000 American perished from COVID-19.

That such ridiculous amount of wealth, impossible to spend in multiple lifetimes and reaped off the backs of workers, is concentrated in the hands of so few people and that children and their mothers die pointlessly for using a space heater, clarifies the direct relationship between the latter and the former, and therefore the primary cause of the fire. Capitalism brutalizes workers, at the expense of their livelihoods and, in many cases, lives, to the benefit the ruling class.



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