

# Massive 7-alarm warehouse fire engulfs West Baltimore, disrupts rail and displaces residents

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14 May 2025

A devastating seven-alarm fire tore through a vacant mattress warehouse in West Baltimore, Maryland Monday evening, sending plumes of smoke over the city, disrupting major rail lines and forcing the evacuation of dozens of residents.

The blaze, which began shortly before 7 p.m. at the intersection of North Bentalou Street and Edmondson Avenue, quickly escalated from a four-alarm to a seven-alarm emergency, drawing more than 200 firefighters to the scene.

Upon arrival, fire crews encountered heavy flames and thick smoke pouring from the multi-story structure, which included two underground levels stacked with mattresses—a highly flammable fuel source that complicated firefighting efforts. The intense heat and risk of collapse forced firefighters to retreat to a defensive, exterior attack, focusing on containment and protecting neighboring row houses.

Baltimore Fire Chief James W. Wallace described the situation as a “deeply entrenched subsurface fire,” noting the unique challenges posed by the building’s construction and contents. “Our goal is to contain it,” Wallace said during a late-night press briefing, emphasizing the safety of both firefighters and residents.

Approximately 30 individuals from 15 households were evacuated from nearby homes as a precaution, with the Red Cross providing temporary housing and support. No injuries were reported as of Tuesday morning, a testament to the swift response of emergency crews and the cooperation of local residents.

The fire’s proximity to a critical rail corridor led to the

suspension of Amtrak’s Northeast line and the MARC commuter train’s Penn line, disrupting travel along the busy Mid-Atlantic route. Amtrak officials said service between Washington and Baltimore was restored by 2:30 a.m. Tuesday, but warned that delays would continue.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation. Early reports suggest that the building, long vacant, was used to store mattresses, which contributed to the rapid spread and intensity of the flames. Fire officials have not ruled out the possibility of accelerants or other hazardous materials inside the structure and are proceeding with caution as they work to fully extinguish the blaze and assess the damage.

Multi-alarm fires of this magnitude are rare in Baltimore. According to city records, there were no six- or seven-alarm fires in 2021, and only one each of third, fourth, and fifth-alarm incidents. The scale of Monday’s blaze underscores the challenges facing Baltimore’s aging industrial infrastructure and the ongoing risks posed by vacant properties.

At the same time, such events are not unprecedented. In August 2020, a gas explosion in northwest Baltimore destroyed several row houses and killed two people, an incident attributed to a natural gas buildup following HVAC work. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that gas leaks in the city’s unimproved infrastructure have nearly doubled since 2009.

Other high-profile tragedies include the 2017 house fire in the Cedmont neighborhood that claimed the lives of six children, and a 2012 row house fire that killed five residents.

The intersection of poverty, aging housing stock and

insufficient public investment have been key factors behind major fires in Baltimore this century. The 2020 explosion, for example, led to scrutiny of utility providers and calls for stronger regulatory oversight after investigators linked the tragedy to faulty gas lines and lapsed safety inspections.

At the same time, the Baltimore Fire Department is chronically understaffed and is short 120 firefighters. Union officials last year said, “Towson, Dundalk, Catonsville and Essex firehouses have been rotating since the Fall of 2023, taking an engine out of service and staffing stations with fire academy personnel,” according to a report by WBAL-TV.



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