# Mother, daughter burned out of home; reason for second alarm investigated

What necessitated a second response by Illinois Valley firefighters to the same residence, after they initially extinguished flames and checked for potential rekindling problems before leaving, is under investigation.

A mother and her daughter lost everything except the clothes they were wearing, and are displaced by the fire. The loss to structure and contents is estimated at $35,380 by Illinois Valley Fire District (IVFD).

Photo by Dale Sandberg/IVFD

The home at 4555 Dick George Road is owned by Sam Michel, a member of the IVFD board of directors. Michel said that other than stating his sympathy for the occupants; and his sentimentality about the home, because it is his first rental, he had no other comment.

Michel has insurance on the property, said Fire Marshal Jerry Schaeffer.

The home occupant was identified by IVFD as Rebecca Sommers. She and her daughter is Mahkayla, 9, are staying temporarily with neighbors Tracy and Terry Taylor.

IVFD staff and volunteers first responded Wednesday at 2:59 p.m. to an alarm for a mobile home at 4555 Dick George Road. Smoke was coming from it.

A subsequent alarm came at 9:11 p.m. with heavy smoke and fire showing from several areas of the dwelling, said Chief Harry Rich. Also, he said, "major electrical arcing of power lines" was coming from one end of the structure.

Schaeffer said that during the fire-fighting from the earlier alarm, he turned off the power to the breaker box. It was determined that the fire had begun in the kitchen, with flames burning up and out from behind the refrigerator. The fire then spread to the ceiling and elsewhere, he said, with the result that the family dog, "Hans," died in a bedroom due to lack of oxygen.

Sommers had returned home from taking a shower at the Taylor home, Schaeffer said. As a result of the first fire, the residence incurred heavy smoke, heat and fire damage, he said.

Schaeffer reported that Sommers told him that the refrigerator had been "making a strange noise" after a daylong power outage. She said that she turned off the breaker for the well pump, as advised by her landlord, during the power outage.

Sommers said that when she returned home from taking a shower and opened the front door, she saw smoke.

Tracy Taylor saw smoke and then fire came around the wall toward her and the front door, said Sommers.

Besides Schaeffer turning off power to the home during the first response, Deputy Chief Jeff Gavlik said that the occupant reported that she earlier had lost power to the entire structure and tried to reset the breaker to the water pump because it had tripped.

"This was due," Gavlik reported, "to the recent snow storm which had caused power problems to her house and water pump."

He added that the cause of the first fire was determined to be electrical.

"The overhaul operations were completed with no smoke, steam or heat found remaining in the structure," he said.

Regarding the later alarm, Rich said that the fire was knocked down approximately 15 minutes after first units arrived -- 10 minutes after the alarm.

Pacific Power, he said, arrived at 10:58 p.m. to disconnect electrical service.

Sommers said that the utility company did not respond at the first alarm although it was contacted.

The chief continued that neighbors Terry & Tracy Taylor said "that they first saw a glow in the area of the home. Sommers said that they saw major electrical arcing coming from "electrical wires that were popping."

"They also stated (that) the heavy concentration of electrical flashes were located at the northern right side of the home and in trees."

Tracy Taylor said that she immediately phoned Pacific Power and 911. She said that when it was dark she had gone to the mobile looking for boots approximately 90 minutes before the second fire.

"There was no glowing, no fire, no nothing," she said.

Sommers said that it was "quite a shock" to discover that her residence was on fire a second time. She is considering whether to engage an attorney.

The chief concluded that, "Due to major damage caused by the secondary fire it is hard to determine a true cause and origin for this incident."

Pacific Power was contacted for comment, but did not respond in time for this issue.

The American Red Cross Southern Oregon Chapter has provided emergency assistance to the mother and daughter displaced by the fire.

**A VEHICLE VS. TREE accident was reported at 10:08 p.m. Monday, March 5 near 989 Dick George Road. Illinois Valley Fire District (IVFD), American Medical Response and Josephine County Sheriff's Office were at the scene. It did not appear that the driver was seriously injured. (Photo by Dale & Elaine Sandberg/IVFD Media Dept.)**

# Suggestions to stop fueling around provided

When gasoline prices are high, nobody wants to be fuelish.

High gasoline prices act as an additional tax on U.S. families. According to the Dept. of Energy, passenger cars and light trucks account for almost 42 percent of U.S. oil consumption and contribute to air pollution.

By taking these simple actions you can save money and help America reduce its dependence on foreign sources of oil.

*Aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration and hard braking) wastes fuel. It can lower your mileage up to 33 percent at highway speeds and by 5 percent around town.

*Idle as little as possible, as idling gets you 0 mpg. The best way to warm up a vehicle is to drive it. You need no more than 30 seconds of idling on winter days before driving away. Anything more simply wastes fuel and increases emissions.

*Combine errands into one trip. Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as a longer multipurpose trip.

*Avoid high speeds. Each 5 mph you drive faster than 60 mph is like paying an additional 15-cents per gallon for gas depending on the current price. Your equivalent gas savings will be from 12-cents to 82-cents per gallon.

*Use air-conditioning only when driving faster than 30 mph.

*Keep tires properly inflated and aligned and improve your gas mileage by around 3.3 percent.

*If the "check engine" light is on, your car might need service.

*Start car-pooling and using mass transit, plus arrange to telecommute.

*Get the junk out of the trunk; light cars use less fuel. A vehicle that gets 30 mpg will cost you $750 less to fuel each year than one that gets 20 mpg (assuming 15,000 miles of driving annually and a fuel cost of $3 per gallon). During a period of five years, the 30 mpg vehicle will save a person $3,750.

*Consider a fuel-efficient vehicle for your next purchase, such as a hybrid or flex-fuel vehicle, which are available in more models every year.

For features about energy and fuel costs, visit www.energy.gov. For A-Z tips on car energy use, visit www.energysavers.gov and click on the "drivers" link.

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