

Fatal New Bedford Fire Started Accidentally

Most Likely Cause Involved Microwave or Wall Outlet

Investigators have determined that this week's deadly rooming house fire started accidentally, said New Bedford Fire Chief Scott Kruger, New Bedford Police Chief Paul J. Oliveira, State Fire Marshal Peter J. Ostroskey, and Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III.

The fire was investigated by the New Bedford Fire Department, New Bedford Police Department, State Police Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit assigned to the State Fire Marshal's office, and State Police assigned to the Bristol District Attorney's office. Collectively, they determined that the fire started in Room 205, located at the left rear of the second floor. Investigators were able to rule out all potential causes except an event involving a microwave in that location or the wall outlet it was plugged into. The microwave had been in use a short time before the fire broke out.

"Our thoughts are still with the families who lost loved ones, the residents who were injured, and those who lost all their belongings," said Chief Kruger. "I'd like to express my deep appreciation to the New Bedford firefighters and mutual aid departments who put everything they had into containing this fire and protecting the surrounding structures. This was a tragic event, but it could have been much worse without the assistance of our public safety partners and our community."

All residents of the four-story rooming house were displaced by the fire. Two victims were recovered from the structure with fatal injuries. District Attorney Quinn identified the first the victim as 59-year-old Manuel Moreira. The second victim, also an adult, has not yet been identified. Five were

hospitalized.

“Electrical fires are the second-leading cause of residential fire deaths in Massachusetts,” said State Fire Marshal Ostroskey. “Appliances that generate heat, like microwaves and toasters, should always be plugged directly into a wall outlet. Don’t use them if the device or the cord is damaged. And call an electrician if outlets are warm, discolored, or loose – these are signs that the outlet is not safe to use.”

The New Bedford Fire Department responded to an alarm activation at 1305 Acushnet Ave. at about 3:15 pm on March 28. On arrival, they observed heavy smoke and flames and occupants hanging from the windows and jumping from the building to escape the danger inside. Firefighters immediately began conducting rescues over ground ladders and five people were transported from the scene for medical care.

A general alarm was declared, bringing all New Bedford apparatus and off-duty personnel to the scene along with dozens of firefighters from surrounding communities. The building was well involved before firefighters arrived, and it sustained catastrophic damage, but firefighters were successful in keeping the blaze from extending to several nearby homes and businesses. The fire was under control by about 6:00 pm but firefighters continued to extinguish hot spots for hours afterward and crews remained on scene overnight.

The fire departments of Acushnet, Dartmouth, and Fairhaven provided mutual aid at the scene. Ambulances from Freetown, Lakeville, Marion, Wareham, and Westport supported New Bedford EMS with patient transport and care.