



News Release

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Department of Public Safety & Corrections
Public Safety Services

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Homeowner Dies in Luling Fire

Smoking Habits May Have Played Role in Death

Luling, LA – State Fire Marshal investigators are continuing to examine the possible causes of a fire that may have killed a homeowner in Luling, Wednesday.

Investigators from the State Fire Marshal's Office responded to 312 Canal Street after parish firefighters were dispatched to a residential fire shortly before 2:00 p.m. after a homeowner, Debra Welch, 62, called 911 to report that her home was on fire.

Firefighters later located the body of George Welch, also 62 years-old, in the master bedroom of the structure, which was severely damaged as a result of the fire.

In a statement to investigators, Debra Welch stated that she was alerted by the smell of smoke, which was then confirmed when her home's smoke alarms began to sound. Welch further stated that she traced the origin of the smoke to a corner of the living room where a portable oxygen tank was located. The living room was adjacent to the master bedroom.

Welch noted that the top of the oxygen tank, which was present to assist her husband who suffers from COPD, was smoldering.

After entering the bedroom, Welch discovered a small fire burning an edge of the bed mattress where her husband was lying, unresponsive. When attempts to extinguish the fire failed, Welch then attempted to remove her husband but was unable to do so. She was then forced to exit the home after the fire and volume of smoke increased. Debra Welch was later treated for minor burns and smoke inhalation before returning to her home.

After being examined by investigators, the body of George Welch was released to St. Charles Parish authorities for autopsy.

While a formal determination as to the cause of the fire has not been confirmed, investigators have established that the origin of the fire was the bedroom where George Welch was located. In addition, burn patterns and the discovery of an ashtray near the point of origin indicated the fire may have been the result of George Welch smoking while he was in the bed. Debra Welch later confirmed that her husband had routinely smoked while in bed, despite her requests to cease doing so.

The status of this investigation remains active.

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LOUISIANA OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL

News Release – Addendum (Luling Fatal Fire; 7/8/15)



Photograph courtesy of Louisiana Office of State Fire Marshal.