



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Spike in Fatal Fires Leads to Call for Action from State Fire Marshal *Latest Case Involves Two Deaths in Cotton Valley Fire*

BATON ROUGE- The State Fire Marshal's Office (SFM) is calling on all Louisiana citizens to increase fire safety awareness and precautions around their homes while deputies actively investigate the state's ninth and tenth fire fatality cases of the year.

"This is an alarming number of deaths due to fire already in 2021," said State Fire Marshal H. "Butch" Browning, "Six of these deaths have happened in February alone and we're not even to the middle of the month yet."

This morning, the Cotton Valley Fire Department responded to the 600 block of Cvoc Road just after 1 a.m. for a report of a trailer fire with three occupants inside. When firefighters arrived, a female occupant had escaped, but two males were still unaccounted for. The bodies of both men were later found in separate bedrooms.

While official identifications and causes of death are pending autopsies, one man is believed to be 50-years-old while the other was in his early 60s. Both were residents of the home and relatives.

After an assessment of the scene, including a statement from the survivor, deputies determined the fire began in the front area of the structure where the older male slept. While the exact cause remains undetermined, investigators are unable to rule out the use of a wood burning stove for heating the home as a contributing factor.

As our presence on that scene was winding down this afternoon, deputies in the Hammond area were being called to assist with an investigation into a fire that claimed one life in the 900 block of Martin Luther King Drive.

At this time, the causes of this year's fatal fires have been across the board from unsafe smoking practices to various electrical issues stemming from improper electrical wiring as well as dangerous home heating practices.

“Every single person, young to old, needs to make a concerted effort to stop this trend and there are simple ways to do that.”

When it comes to electrical safety, avoid connecting extension cords and power strips to create power sources where a wall outlet does not exist and don't overload those cords and strips if using them for temporary purposes. Plug all appliances, including space heaters, directly into wall outlets to prevent overheating of wires. And if your home is experiencing electrical issues, have a licensed electrician evaluate the situation and make any needed repairs.

On the topic of smoking, it's always best to smoke outdoors. Ensure all smoking materials are properly extinguished in the appropriate manner and keep all spark-producing objects, like lighters, out of the reach of children. Also, refrain from smoking when tired or under the influence of alcohol or medications that make you drowsy.

Home heating options should never include using kitchen appliances like stoves and ovens to stay warm. This is a fire danger and a potential cause of carbon monoxide poisoning. If utilizing a space heater, make sure it is located three to five feet away from combustible objects like blankets and never leave them on when you're going to sleep or leaving your home. If using a fireplace or wood-burning stove, make sure the fire is out before you go to bed or leave your home and that it is not overloaded causing the potential for wood to fall out while on fire.

Lastly, the majority of these cases involved homes with no working smoke alarms. Smoke alarms are a proven tool to alert residents to a fire danger in order to escape safely. The SFM's Operation Save-A-Life partners with local fire departments to install smoke alarms for free for families that need them most.

“If you do nothing else after hearing these figures and reading these safety tips, please make sure you do not go to sleep tonight without at least one smoke alarm watching over you and your family,” said Browning, “And, please, take this warning seriously.”

To learn more about Operations Save-A-Life, or to register for a smoke alarm installation, visit lasfm.org

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