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## Blaze causes evacuation of apartment complex



Charred embers remain after a blaze gutted this apartment early Sunday. (Photo courtesy of Don Gardner, Orofino Fire Department)

One woman received second degree burns in an Orofino apartment fire early Sunday that soon necessitated evacuation of neighbors from 13 other apartments in the complex.

Orofino Fire Department received the call of an apartment fire in #9 at Valley Apartment, 2350 Michigan Ave., at 2:35 a.m. Second and third alarms soon went out for mutual aid from Sunnyside Rural Fire Department and Twin Ridge Rural Fire Department. In addition, Clearwater County Ambulance Service and several officers from Clearwater County Sheriff's Department and Orofino Police Department responded to assist.

According to Orofino Fire Chief Mike Lee, Kristen Ellis had second degree burns to her right hand and arm. She was taken by Clearwater County Ambulance Service to Clearwater Valley Hospital where she remains today, Sunday. She had two grandchildren staying with her, one seven years old and one nine months old. Lee said she attempted to put out the fire which started in her apartment and then took the two children outside. Ellis then went back inside to call for help and almost got caught inside. No one else was injured in the blaze. The two children have been reunited with their mother.

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**A blackened apartment stands as a reminder of the blaze that gutted it early Sunday morning.**

When fire fighters arrived, evacuation of the remaining residents was the number one priority. After that was accomplished, fire fighters successfully worked to contain the fire to the original apartment. Lee said that apartment was destroyed and there was smoke and water damage to the adjacent upstairs apartments and two below. A trench cut was also made in the roof of one of the other upstairs apartments to make sure the fire had not gone into the attic. He estimated the damage at over \$50,000.



The roof shows evidence of where fighters made a trench cut in the roof of this apartment to make sure there was no fire in the attic.

Residents who did not have friends or relatives to stay with were taken to Best Western Lodge at River's Edge or the Helgeson Place Hotel Suites for the remainder of the night. American Red Cross representatives met with residents this morning to assess their individual needs.

Twenty-nine fire fighters from the three departments were on scene. Michigan Ave. was closed for about 1 1/2 hours during the height of the fire fighting efforts. When traffic flow was restored, extreme caution was needed due to the icy road conditions.



**A State Fire Marshal checks out the scene. (Photo courtesy of Don Gardner, Orofino Fire Department)**

Lee said the State Fire Marshall from the Coeur d'Alene office was on scene this morning and it was determined that an electrical baseboard heater was the cause. The apartment complex was released to its owners, Paul and Lee Pippenger, about 1 p.m. Sunday. Lee said he was not sure how many of the residents had been able to move back in as of Sunday afternoon. Part of that is dependant on whether power has been restored to their apartments.

According to the Red Cross representative coordinating the effort, the organization is able to help fire victims with one week of groceries, clothing, shoes and outer wear, if that was lost, and up to three nights lodging. He said after that the most critical need of those who are displaced is a place to stay and moral support. He added that November through February are the months with the highest number of family fires. This year, there has been a huge increase in the number of residential fires all over Idaho. The help that the Red Cross gives fire victims comes from local donations to the organization. Those who would like to make a donation for disaster assistance may send it to: American Red Cross North Central Idaho District Office, 721 7th Ave., Lewiston, ID 83544. Checks should designate that the funds are for local disaster relief. He said he is thankful for the help and support in Orofino. "That is what it is all about neighbors helping neighbors."