



News Release

Office of the Louisiana State Fire Marshal
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Two People Die in St. James Apartment Fire

Convent, LA- State Fire Marshal H. "Butch" Browning released information this morning relating to a tragic fatal fire in St. James Parish where two people have died in their apartment.

The Union Convent Volunteer Fire Department was called shortly after 1:00am this morning to 6202-101 Reverend Thomas Scott Street to a report that an apartment complex was on fire. When firefighters arrived they discovered the entire eight unit single story building to be involved in flames. First Responders were able to remove nearly 25 people from the apartments however despite their heroic efforts, two occupants in apartment F died in their home. The bodies of Shirley M. Howard (dob. 8-24-52) and Ray Mitchell (8-27-57) were located and pronounced dead at the scene by the St. James Parish Coroner. Mutual aid was also provided by the Paulina Volunteer Fire Department.

The State Fire Marshal's Office was called to investigate this tragic loss of lives and to determine why this fire occurred. Fire Marshal Deputies have no clear cause at this time but are examining heating devices in the apartment. The building is owned and operated by the St. James Parish Housing and Urban Development Program. It is believed that smoke alarms alerted of the fire in the apartments, it has not been confirmed if the alarm in apartment F was operating. The St. James Parish Sheriff's Office is also working jointly in this investigation.

Fire Marshal Browning stated, "These two deaths are so saddening to us. Three people have now have died this week in home fires in our state. I beg everyone to take steps now to ensure your home has working smoke alarms and with the cold temperatures we are experiencing, practice safety with heating equipment. If you use space heaters you must keep a five foot area clear around them to ensure a fire does not start".

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