



News Release

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Department of Public Safety and Corrections
Public Safety Services

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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St. Landry Parish House Fire Claims Life of Resident

Opelousas, LA – A late evening fire damages an Opelousas home, leaving the homeowner dead. State Fire Marshal investigates cause.

Just after 8:30 p.m. last evening, State Fire Marshal Investigators were called upon to investigate a deadly fire in the City of Opelousas. Opelousas fire crews were dispatched around 7:30 p.m. to a residential structure fire at 1322 Parkview Drive.

Immediately upon arrival, firefighters entered the structure in an attempt to rescue the single occupant of the home. In the kitchen area of the residence, firefighters located the victim, 63 year old Vera Gabriel, lying on the floor. Gabriel was quickly moved to a safe location where resuscitation efforts could be performed by first responders. Unfortunately, those efforts proved futile and Gabriel was pronounced dead at the scene by the St. Landry Parish Coroner's Office.

State Fire Marshal Investigators determined the deadly fire to have originated in the living area, with the point of origin being a sofa near the front doorway of the residence. Within that area of origin, investigators located smoking materials and matches.

Investigators learned that Gabriel's grandson, Brian Gabriel, 17, who lived with Gabriel, had entered the residence some thirty minutes before the fire to retrieve money from his bedroom. Before leaving the home, Brian Gabriel admittedly removed a pack of cigarettes from his grandmother's bedroom as she slept.

Brian Gabriel stated that he took the pack of cigarettes into the kitchen area where he obtained a box of matches for the purpose of smoking a cigarette. He claims to have lit the cigarette as he walked from the kitchen area into the living area of the residence. He did not recall where he discarded the used match, but said that it was somewhere in the living area of the home. Brian Gabriel did recall that he had tossed the pack of cigarettes and the box of matches on the couch in the living area.

At this time, the investigation remains active, with the official fire cause classified as undetermined, with the inability to rule out accidental causes. According to family members there were no operational smoke alarms in the home at the time of the fire.

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