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Toledo Fire and Rescue Department

TO: Adam Loukx, Law Director

THRU: Luis Santiago, Fire Chief

FROM: Deputy Chief Gary Martin, Operations Bureau

SUBJECT: Review of 3125 Meadowbrook Ct.

3125 MEADOWBROOK CT.

A Post-Incident Review for the second alarm fatal fire at 3125 Meadowbrook Ct. was held on Saturday January 21, 2012. Prior to the Post Incident Review, interviews had been conducted with the personnel working on the responding units as well as a thorough review of the tape of this incident. This was a three story apartment building with fire visible on the second floor shortly after our arrival. There were 4 apartments located on each floor for a total of 12 units. The following observations were reached after an investigation of the incident was completed.

THE EVENT

The fire units were dispatched at 0345:03 and arrived at 0348:59. The initial report of "smoke showing" was given by E25, the first unit on the scene. The officer on E25 assumed command of the fire. There was no visible fire at the time of our arrival but shortly after fire was reported on division two. Occupants were observed walking out of the structure and one just standing at the entrance to the apartment building. A request for two additional engines was made within the first minute. E23 company was dispatched as "RIT" and began to do their duties on their arrival. E25 was assigned "attack" and Sq 15 was ordered to "get everyone out". E25 was stretching a hand line to the fire on division two. T25 assisted with getting the hand line to the structure while the driver was preparing the truck for roof operations. When Sq 15 proceeded directly to division two, they picked up the nozzle and began to attack the fire. This change of assignment from "search" to "attack" was transmitted over the portable radio to the Incident Commander. Sq15 also conducted a search of division two but that activity was not transmitted to the Incident Commander. RA17, after a face to face conversation with the Incident Commander, went to division three to conduct a search. "Water on the fire" was transmitted approximately seven minutes after our arrival. Also, in that seven minutes

heavy fire was reported on division three as well as fire in the attic. T25 was on the roof venting the structure. The crews on division three did a high risk search without the use of hand lines and reported heavy fire before the hand lines could reach them. Upon arrival, T5 talked with the Incident Commander and went to division three to assist with attack. They had to cross-connect hand lines in order to reach division three. Children were spotted at a second floor window by our "RIT" team while conducting a 360 of the structure. This occurred approximately 10 minutes after our arrival. A second alarm was called for by the Incident Commander. The four children were rescued by fire fighters from our "RIT team. E17 assisted with ground ladders and took over the role of assisting "RIT". This was not transmitted over the radio but was ordered by the Incident Commander via a face to face conversation. A fifth occupant was removed from the third floor as well. An "all clear" was given for the third division which was the top floor and the floor directly above the fire. When E16 arrived they were assigned "search" division two. E18 was the next unit to arrive and they were assigned "search" division one the floor below the fire. That search crew had just entered the building (0406) one minute prior to the order "to evacuate" (0407) was given by the Incident Commander. A complete search of division one was unable to be conducted prior to the order to "evacuate the structure". The two apartments that were not searched by E18 were numbers 37 and 38. At 0407 "emergency traffic" was requested and the order to evacuate came again, this was 18 minutes after our arrival. The entire attic space of the structure was engulfed in flames. The fire had been burning for at least 24 minutes.

Water pressure was an issue because the hydrant at the end of the street could not accommodate our hand lines used in the initial attack of the fire. This caused a delay in getting the volume of water needed to suppress the fire. The quick spread of the fire into the attic space of the entire building and lack of available water at the time caused the Incident Commander to order the evacuation of the structure. The safety of the firefighters at this time was a major concern of the Incident Commander. A second hydrant was taken on Monroe St. by E14 and laid down Meadowbrook Ct. to the scene to help with the water pressure issue.

Information gathered at the scene from civilians lead the Incident Commander to believe that all occupants were accounted for. At some later point he received information that someone may be in the apartment on the left, number 37, which is where the initial call originated. Upon hearing that information the Incident Commander and two fire fighters entered the structure to do a secondary search of apartment 37. While one fire fighter searched apartment 37 the other walked into number 38. The door to 38 was open so the fire fighter entered and walked down the hall. It was dark and he felt some heat in the hall near the bedrooms. He was unable to see any furniture from his position due to the darkness. He did not search the apartment because of the belief that everyone was accounted for and they were inside to check apartment 37. Because of structural instability, the fire conditions in the structure, and the belief that all the occupants were out, the secondary search was performed rapidly.

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THE FINDINGS

This incident had many stressors associated with it such as; structure type, life hazards, water pressure issues, heavy fire volume, winter weather conditions and the building's location. It was located at the end of a dead end street. The crews performed well considering the many functions that had to be considered and involved in an incident of this magnitude. The assigned order of the floors to be searched was done by text book standards. We are taught to search the fire floor first, the floor above the fire floor second, and in this case the floor below the fire floor last. There were some communication issues because the Incident Commander and some crews had face to face communications. These assignments were not announced over the radio. Therefore, the other crews on the scene were unaware of their locations and duties. This became an accountability issue and caused safety concerns for us. We need to be specific when giving out assignments. At future incidents such as this, I recommend that a face to face meeting between all officers and the Incident Commander be held immediately after the order to evacuate is given. The purpose of such a meeting is to check the status of areas which may still need to be searched as well as to assess the interior conditions of the structure. The result of these conversations may allow for a decision to send a team back into the structure in an effort to search the unsearched areas of the building. We must take into account the risk to our firefighters in order to save a viable life. Another issue to explore is if we are able to solve the water pressure concern in a timely manner, then regroup and make another attempt to attack the fire from the interior. There are two more things to consider. First, we could have used the first truck crew on the scene as a search team, but the Incident Commander was unaware that a second truck had been dispatched. However, if this is done, it could have an adverse effect on our search and fire fighting efforts because of a delay in the ventilation of the structure. Lastly, the RIT team could have been reassigned to search a division in the structure. Once again this action puts our fire fighters at risk because the RIT team would not be available for fire fighter rescue if needed. These are complex decisions that the Incident Commander must make.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deputy Chief Gary Martin

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