

**Verona Fire Prevention Bureau
880 Bloomfield Ave
Verona, New Jersey 07044
(973)-857-4761**

Fire Investigation Report

DATE: 7/5/2023
DATE OF FIRE: 7/3/2023

FPB INV- K. Schmertz(303)
J. Koslow (302)
C. McCann(304)

TYPE OF FIRE: **Electrical/Storage Contents**

LOCATION: 2 Claridge Drive
BLOCK: 102 LOT: 1

OWNER INFORMATION:

OWNER: Claridge House Two
ADDRESS: 2 Claridge Drive
CITY & STATE: Verona, NJ 07044
TELEPHONE#:

REPORTED BY:

☐ NEIGHBOR ☐ CENTRAL STATION ☐ OWNER ☐ RESIDENT ☒ OTHER - Doorman
TIME ALARM RECEIVED: 11:41
ALARM RECEIVED VIA: ☒ TELEPHONE ☐ OTHER:

STRUCTURE INFORMATION:

NATURE OF OCCUPANCY: Multi Family High-rise ☐ VACANT ☒ OCCUPIED ☐ UNOCCUPIED
TYPE OF CONSTRUCTION: Type 1 – Fire resistive
NUMBER OF STORIES: 13
AREA INVOLVED WITH FIRE: Storage area on 12th and 10th floors

FIRE DEPARTMENT INFORMATION:

TIME OF DISPATCH: 11:41
OFFICER IN CHARGE: 220 – Lt. Knoetig, 101 – Chief Tedesco(assumed command once he arrived)
FIRST FIRE UNIT ON SCENE: Engine 14
FIRST FIRE PERSONNEL ON SCENE: Engine 14 crew – Lt Knoetig, FF Barnett, FF Sabo

FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU INFORMATION:

TEMPERATURE: 85 WEATHER: Clear
ROAD CONDITION: Dry
FIRE AREA OF ORIGIN: Storage room on West side on 12th floor – in/around electric box
HEAT SOURCE: Possible electrical issue
MATERIAL IGNITED: coating of wires and contents of storage

CAUSE OF FIRE (PROBABLE):

☐ ACCIDENTAL
☐ NATURAL
☐ INCENDIARY
☒ UNDETERMINED

OTHER AGENCIES CALLED TO ASSIST:

(X) VERONA POLICE DETECTIVE BUREAU:	NAME: Det. Maguire
(X) ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTORS OFFICE:	NAME: Notification only
(X) OTHER: NJ Division of Fire Safety	NAME: Notification only
(X) P.S.E.G.	GAS ☐ ELEC. ☒
PHOTOS TAKEN	(X) YES ☐ NO

UTILITIES:

☐ GAS - METER #	☒ ELEC. - METER#
☐ OIL ☐ OTHER:	PANEL RATING:

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT: Fire Damage to contents of storage in 12th and 10th floor, West side storage rooms. Heat throughout storage rooms. Smoke damage throughout fire rooms and connecting rooms/hallways. Water damage on floors 10 and 12.

NARRATIVE: SEE ATTACHED INVESTIGATION NARRATIVE

INTERVIEW NOTES: SEE ATTACHED INTERVIEW NOTES

PHOTOS: Scene photographed by Fire Inspector/Investigator Schmertz and attached to report.

INVESTIGATORS:

Lead Investigator – Fire Inspector/Investigator Kenneth Schmertz, Verona Fire Prevention Bureau

Assisting Investigator(s) – Fire Inspector/Investigator Connor McCann, Verona Fire Prevention Bureau

– Fire Inspector Jared Koslow, Verona Fire Prevention Bureau

DATE: 7/7/2023

Respectfully Submitted,

Fire Inspector/Investigator Kenneth Schmertz #303

Introduction

On 7/3/2023, at approximately 11:41 hours, the Verona Fire Department (VFD) was dispatched to a report of smoke coming from the roof of 2 Claridge Dr, a 13 story multi-family high-rise of type 1-fire resistive. VFD Stations 1 & 2 responded and Lieutenant Knoetig, who was the first fire arriving officer on scene with Engine 14. Lt. Knoetig established command and started to direct crews from Engine 14 and Engine 10 to the 12th floor and the roof where smoke and fire was first reported. He requested mutual aid and once they arrived, they were told to report up to the 10th floor. Standpipe operations were utilized on the 2 floors where fire was found(10th and 12th). Once the fire appeared to be knocked down, while crews were checking for extension, evacuations began on floors 10-12. The decision was eventually made to evacuate the entire West side of the building.

While the evacuations were being done, the fire investigation was being done on the top floors. The building manager had contacted their fire alarm and sprinkler companies to respond out. Upon departure that night, the sprinkler company(City Fire) repaired the base of the fire department connection properly, after a valve failed when first putting water into it. The fire alarm company was able to bypass 8 smoke detectors on the 12th floor that appeared to have had wire affected by fire. After bypassing the 8 detectors, the alarm tech was able to reset the panel so there was a working fire alarm on all floor except the 12 on the West side. A fire watch would be done by building maintenance personnel until the 12th floor had working alarms again.

I was out of town and unable to respond to the fire scene at the time of the fire. Once I was headed into town, I spoke to Fire Inspector/Investigator McCann and was told that himself and Fire Inspector/Investigator

Koslow would be coming back to the fire house and we would regroup and head back up to the scene. We arrived back at the scene approximately 17:30.

Fire Scene Examination

On 7/3/2023, at approximately 17:30 hours, Fire Inspector/Investigators Connor McCann, Jared Koslow and I arrived at 2 Claridge Drive to conduct the investigation of the earlier fire. We conducted a systematic, backwards investigation pursuant to guidelines set forth in NFPA 921 and NFPA 1033. Our investigation was conducted from the areas of least damage to the areas of most damage.

Inspector/Investigator McCann went up to the fire floor and shortly after requested me to come up. Inspector/Investigator Koslow interviewed the first fire personnel as well as any civilians that were involved. He noted their actions and observations. Once I arrived at the 12th floor, I met with Inspector/Investigator McCann and we looked at the areas affected by fire. We specifically observed and photographed an electrical box, which the electrician referred to as a 'J' box, which is simply a junction box. There was conduit coming up through the floor to this 'J' box and continuing up after. After we photographed the exterior of the 'J' box, the electrician then took the J cover off and additional pictures were taken of the inside of the box. The electrician pointed out what appeared to be a possible point of failure in the box. After getting pictures of that box, we also went down the storage room on the 10th floor, where there had also been fire. At that point Inspector/Investigator McCann was requested in OEM duties.

I started my investigation from an unaffected floor 9 and photographed the door from the stairwell, into the hallway and down the hall. I then went up to floor 10, where I photographed the same and this time continued to photograph towards the fire room and into the fire room on that floor. That fire is what appeared to be secondary to the fire on floor 12. The fire on the 10th floor appeared to be in a cage/locker storage area for the tenants on that floor. Looking in the same storage locker as the fire location on the 12th floor, I noticed that the same conduit runs through between floors. The contents that were right against and around the conduit appears

to be what was on fire. Looking at the contents of that locker, there didn't appear to be any possible heat sources stored in there. I continued up to the 11th and continued with the same order of photographing the stairwell side of that level door, into the hallway and looking down the hallway. Although there was no fire on this level, there was smoke in the storage locker on that level and there was evidence of burning material dripping or running down the conduit. The locker that was in the same location had no storage in it at all.

I then returned to the fire floor and photographed the same order up to the fire room. Entering the fire room, I took a picture of the length of that room, and the locker section where the fire was located. Examining the debris on the floor in that storage locker, there did not appear to be any possible heat sources. This led me to look at the 'J' box more closely. I did see and took closer pictures of where the possible electrical failure was, as well as the rest of the interior of the 'J' box.

I went up to the roof and document the two exhaust fans that were knocked off in the process of trying to vent smoke and heat from the rooms the fire department was operating in. Based on the observation of the scene, along with reviewing the interviews of the first arriving fire crews, building maintenance, and the building manager, the area of origin did appear to be in the storage room on the 12th floor.

Security

The building is located at the top of Claridge Dr. The building was occupied at the time of the fire. The fire department forced doors to the 10th and 12th floor storage rooms, as well as a few apartments in the immediate vicinity.

Fire Protection

The building has a full fire alarm, partial sprinkler in the parking garages and a standpipe system. The fire alarm had been placed on test that morning without notifying the Verona Fire Prevention Bureau. When the fire department arrived they did utilize the standpipe. Initially a corroded valve at the bottom failed, but was

replaced with a quarter-turn ball valve as a temporary fix. The sprinkler company replaced that with the proper valve that night. The fire alarm company found 8 alarms and 113 troubles/communication failures on the 12th floor. That led the tech to believe that the wiring on the 12th floor was affected by fire. The tech was able to by pass the 12th floor detectors and reset the panel, leaving 112 troubles and no alarms. A fire watch is being conducted on the 12th floor until the fire alarm is fully restored to the 12th floor.

Photographs

The scene was photographed by F/I Schmertz and F/I McCann and is attached to this report file.

Conclusion

After examination of the scene and reviewing interviews obtained by F/I Koslow, it was determined that area of origin was on 12th floor in the storage room. It appears to have been electrical in nature and originating in an electrical 'J' box in the first storage locker in that room. The fire would be classified as **Accidental** in nature. These conclusions are drawn according to the principles expressed in NFPA 921-2021 *Guide for fire and explosion investigations* and reported based off of any and all data collected and analyzed throughout the investigation. Should any additional data present itself in relation to this incident, the investigator reserves the right to develop, test and select revised hypotheses as to the origin cause and classification of this fire. This investigation has been completed and is closed.