

FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT



**Atlantic City Fire Department - Chief Scott Evans
Fire Prevention Bureau**

Fire Official - Mohammad Hatefi

**Investigation# :
Date/Time : 04/25/2025 16:18
Location : 1809 Hummock Ave
Lead Investigator : Rauch, Joe**



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Fire Prevention Bureau
1301 Bacharach Blvd Room 130
Atlantic City, NJ, 08401
Phone# (609) 347-5595
xxxxxxxxxx@xxxx.xxx
Attn: Fire Official Mohammad R. Hatefi

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Atlantic City

Incident# : 25-001982 **Investigation#** : **Police Call#** : 2025032934
Report By : Rauch, Joe
Incident Date : 04/25/2025 16:18:17 **Location** : 1809 Hummock Ave
CFS Code : Fire- Structure **CSZ** : Atlantic City, NJ 08401
Report Date : 05/15/2025 14:54:05 **Investigation Type** : Building fire

Investigator(s)

Name	Position	Assigned Date	Assigned By	Unit#	On Scene Date
Rauch, Joe	Lead	05/15/2025 18:54:15	Kohler, Stephen		

Scene

Scene Information

Scene Secured?	: Yes	Secured By	: ACFD/ACPD
Scene Released	: 04/26/2025 14:56:41	Released To	:
Property Value	: \$0.00	Property Loss	: \$0.00
Content Value	: \$0.00	Content Loss	: \$0.00
Authority to Enter	: Exigency	Scene Notes	:

Weather Conditions

Visibility	: Clear	Wind Direction	: South West
Temperature (F)	: 70.0	Wind Speed	: 14.0
Relative Humidity	: 59	Precipitation	: 0
Lightning	: No	Elevation	:
Lat / Long	: 39.366126000000		: -74.437871000000

Structure

Occupancy/Construction

Property Use	: Multifamily dwelling. Includes apartments, condos, town houses, row houses, tenements.	Construction Year	:	Stories	:	Length	:
Construction	:	Foundation Type	:			Width	:
Exterior Covering	:	Roof Construction	:				
Floor Construction	:	Building Status	:	In Normal use			

Protection/Alarm/Security

Sprinklers?	☐	Windows	☐
Standpipes?	☐	Doors	☐
Alarm System?	☐	Security Camera?	☐
Smoke Detectors?	☐	Others	

Conditions

Doors	:	Windows	:
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Utilities

Electric	:	Water	:
Gas/Fuel	:	Telephone	:

Vehicle

Mobile Property Involved	: None	VIN#	:	Stolen?	☐
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Mobile Property Type	:	Model	:	Alarm System?	☐
Mobile Property Make	:	Year	:	No. of Keys	
Plate#	:	Odometer	:	Hidden Keys?	☐

Narrative

ACPD CASE #: 25-0032934

ACFD Case #: 25-001982-000

ORIGIN & NATURE OF INCIDENT

On Friday, April 25, 2025, at approximately 1618 Hours, Atlantic City Police Department (ACPD) Patrol Division personnel and Atlantic City Fire Department (ACFD) Apparatus were dispatched to 1809-11 Hummock Avenue in Atlantic City, Atlantic County, New Jersey, in response to a 911-Emergency telephone call reporting a structure fire at this location.

The property is listed on the City of Atlantic City Tax Map as block 507 Lot 5. The owner of record for the property is identified as Ocean Property Group, LLC.

Upon arrival on scene responding ACFD personnel confirmed a working structure fire. Noting visible flames and heavy smoke emanating from the front (A side) of the building they immediately initiated fire suppression efforts. For additional detailed information regarding the fire suppression operations refer to the Atlantic City Fire Department Incident report.

Fire loss estimates are approximately \$600,609.00, at an 80% loss was estimated using the International Code Council building evaluation data, dated February 2025. A value of the contents lost inside the building were not factored into the above estimations. The building was reportedly insured at the time of the fire. There were no known injuries or fatalities reported as a result of the fire.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Weather conditions at the time of the fire were clear skies, Fair and mild, approximately 72 degrees Fahrenheit, a dew point of 53 degrees, 51% humidity, and winds out of the South Southwest at 14 mph, barometric pressure 30.06 in.

SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION / LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

On Friday, April 25, 2025, at approximately 1800 hours, I, Sergeant J.M. Rauch #539 of the Atlantic City Police Department was contacted via telephone by ACPD Communications Bureau personnel and requested to respond to the scene for the purpose of conducting an investigation into the origin and cause of the fire. When I arrived on scene fire suppression efforts were still being conducted by Atlantic City Fire Department personnel. Once the fire was extinguished and placed under control an overhaul operation began, and a warrantless entry was made to the premises by ACFD Deputy Chief M. Hatefi and I for the purpose of conducting an initial scene and fire investigation. After conducting an initial scene examination, a determination was made to suspend further investigation efforts due to nightfall and the loss of light. Atlantic City Police Department personnel were posted to secure the scene until we were able to continue the investigation the next day.

On Saturday, April 26, 2025, at approximately 0915 hours, I, along with ACFD Deputy Chief M. Hatefi and ACFD Captain J. Wilkins arrived back on scene to continue the investigation. At approximately 1230 hours, we concluded the initial investigation and released the building. Atlantic City Public Works personnel responded to secure and board the exterior of the building.

Investigation efforts documented within this report were to establish the origin and cause of this fire. Additional information learned and obtained from fire department personnel, interviews of witnesses, and persons on scene were significant to the origin and cause analysis of this fire event; based on the overall collection of data, reasonable hypotheses were developed as to where and how the fire could have started.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

An examination of the building revealed that it is a three story, multi-family, apartment building. According to Atlantic City Tax records the building was constructed in 1940. The owner is listed as Ocean Property Group, LLC. The building is approximately 65 feet long (north to South) and 25 feet wide (East to West). Overall interior living space was approximately 4238 square feet according to Atlantic City Tax record information. The building was constructed using Type 3 ordinary construction, with brick exterior walls, and unprotected wooden floor.



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and roof assembly. The roof was constructed combination of flat and pitched style covered in a rubber latex membrane. There was an exterior wooden fire escape extending all three floors on the East facing exterior wall of the building (Side D) with doors accessing the apartments on all three floors. The main entrance to the building was located on the front exterior Southern facing wall (Side A), at the Western most corner, and opened in to an interior ascending staircase leading up to all three floors. Two additional doors leading to the first-floor front apartment were also on the front Southern facing side of the building (Side A). Electric service was supplied to the building via overhead cable attached to the exterior Western facing wall (Side D). It was active and energized at the time of the fire. All main household items were believed to be operational, although not necessarily in use at the time of the fire. There were no monitored fire detection or suppression systems present in the building. Audible single station smoke detectors were heard during the course of the fire and initial investigation.

INJURIES OR FATALITIES BY FIRE

There were no injuries or fatalities reported to civilians, police, or fire department personnel as a result of this fire.

INTERVIEWS

Paul Clifford Cook – resident of Apartment [REDACTED], dob – [REDACTED] – Was interviewed on 4/25/2025, at the scene and stated that he was home inside his third-floor rear apartment [REDACTED] in the company of his roommate Tyree McGhee, when he began experiencing a feeling of irritation in his eyes and detected the smell of smoke. As the smoke became stronger and heavier he exited the apartment into the hallway and discovered the building was on fire. He and McGhee immediately grabbed their cellphones and any valuables that were immediately available then fled out onto the exterior fire escape and down to the street without injury or incident.

Tyree McGhee – resident of Apartment [REDACTED] Was interviewed on 4/25/2025, at the scene, at which time his statement was consistent with the statement of his roommate Paul Cook as previously noted.

Michael Fath – resident of Apartment [REDACTED] dob – [REDACTED] – was interviewed on 4/26/2025, at the scene and stated that he was the registered occupant of the first-floor front apartment #1, and the maintenance person for the apartment building.

He explained that he was not home at the time of the fire, that he had been staying with his girlfriend and at another residence locally where he was doing construction work for the owner. He primarily used the apartment at 1809 Hummock Avenue to store his collectibles, which he reportedly auctioned and sold on the internet. He noted that the interior of the apartment was heavily congested with his collectibles leaving only a pathway to navigate between rooms and both the front and back doors.

He continued on to state that because he had not been staying at the apartment he recently allowed a friend, whom he identified as Patrick Novak, to stay in the apartment. He noted that Novak restricted his occupancy to the left front room of the apartment, which was previously a storefront with the exterior front door blocked off from the inside. Both rooms of the first-floor front apartment were connected through a shared non-functioning bathroom located on the left or Western facing side of the building.

When questioned, Fath explained that there were “makeshift” electrical connections and several extension cords, power strips, and outlet hubs running through the apartment from various outlets supplying electricity for lamps, phone charger, etc.

When asked about smoking and drug use inside the apartment, Fath advised he and Novak are both smokers and former drug users. He restated that he was not at the apartment at time of the fire and that he had not been there for some time. He heard about the fire and came to collect what belongings he could.

Patrick Novak – Occupant of Apartment [REDACTED] dob – [REDACTED] – On Monday, April 28, 2025, at approximately 1000 hours, I, Sergeant J.M. Rauch #539 along with ACFD Captain S. Kohler interviewed Patrick Novak.

This audio/video recorded interview was conducted at Atlantic City Police Department Headquarters located at 2711-15 Atlantic Avenue in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Criminal Investigations Section Offices, Interview Room #127-A.

Prior to initiating any conversation or direct questions regarding this investigation, I verbally advised Novak of his Miranda Rights reading from the ACPD Miranda rights Form. Novak acknowledged his understanding of his Miranda Rights and voluntarily agreed to waive those rights and answer questions. He subsequently read and signed the Miranda Rights form, further acknowledging his understanding and desire



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to waive his Miranda Rights and answer questions.

The following is a brief synopsis of the information provided by Novak during the interview.

Novak stated he was out earlier in the day and returned to the first-floor apartment at 1809-11 Hummock Avenue in the afternoon at approximately 1 or 2 o'clock. Shortly thereafter he decided to sort his dirty clothes, which were kept in trash bags, into piles on the floor by the interior doorway which was covered by a blanket on the left side of the first-floor apartment where he was staying and kept his belongings. After sorting his laundry Novak exited the apartment through the rear door out onto Hobart Avenue and walked around to see what was happening outside. A few minutes he returned to the rear of the apartment on Hobart Avenue and became involved in conversation with an unknown male whom he recognized from the neighborhood.

While in conversation he heard a male voice, which he recognized as his neighbor Mr. Moody, calling his name from the area of Hummock Avenue. He then walked around the corner to the front of the building and Mr. Moody told him his apartment was on fire. He saw immediately same smoke coming from the blocked off doorway of his first-floor apartment and ran back around to the rear door of the apartment. Entering inside the apartment through the rear door he encountered heavy black smoke coming from the front left room where he was staying and kept his belongings.

He recalled the blanket that covered the doorway was hot to the touch and knocking it down he was overcome by smoke and immediately retreated out of the apartment through the rear door. Novak noted that he felt heat and heavy black smoke, but did not see any flames while inside the apartment.

Once outside he went to the front of the building and Mr. Moody told him to help the other tenants on the second and third floor get out of the building. Entering the front door to the Left he ascended the interior staircase and encounter several tenants exiting down the staircase. On the second floor landing he was again overcome by smoke and retreated back downstairs and outside. He returned to the rear entrance of the first-floor front apartment on Hobart Avenue, where a female neighbor on the third floor lowered down a garden hose and he began spraying water inside the first-floor front apartment. Moving inside the apartment he continued spraying water on the fire in the direction of the doorway that was previously covered by a blanket in an effort to extinguish the fire, but the spraying of the water just seemed to move the fire around and make it worse so he retreated back out of the apartment and waited for the fire department to arrive.

Novak stated that prior to returning home earlier in the day he stopped to purchase cigarettes, and although he is a person who smokes he was not smoking inside the apartment prior to the fire. The last time he recalled smoking inside the apartment was the previous night. He further admitted being a user of illegal drugs but denied using any drugs inside the apartment recently or prior to the fire. He also denied the presence or recent use of any other smoking materials, candles, or heating units/devices prior to the fire.

Novak further noted that there were two surge protectors stretched across the floor inside the Left front room of the first-floor apartment where he was staying. The first one was at the front of the room near the blocked door leading to Hummock Avenue, that had a lamp, and his cellphone charger plugged into it. The second surge protector was on the floor at the back of the room near the doorway covered with a black where he was sorting his laundry. He was not sure where the two surge protectors were plugged in or connected. He also noted that there were several other electrical extension cords running through the first-floor front apartment and other areas of the building with a lot of exposed electrical wires visible throughout the building, especially in the front left room of the first-floor apartment where he was staying there were three electrical boxes mounted on the back wall with visible wires running up into the exposed ceiling and into the walls.

For additional detailed information refer to the audio/video recorded interview of Patrick Novak.

FIRE SCENE EXAMINATION

I conducted a detailed and systematic examination of the fire scene, beginning with an external examination and proceeding to the interior portions of the fire scene. In both areas I worked from the areas with the least amount of visible damage from the effects of fire, heat, and smoke, to the areas with the most significant amount of damage. An emphasis was made on recognition, identification, and analysis of fire and heat patterns. Throughout the scene investigation the steps of the scientific method as described in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 921 were utilized. For purposes of this report the front side of the building (Side A), which faces Hummock Avenue, and also faces the direction of the Atlantic Ocean, will be identified as the South or Southern facing wall.

The front exterior of the Southern facing wall (Side A) showed minimal signs of a fire. Minimal smoke staining was observed above the three entrance doors facing Hummock Avenue. The heaviest concentration of smoke damage was observed on the transom and wall above the middle door. Moving in a clockwise direction, I proceeded to the Western facing exterior wall (Side B). The wall displayed significant heat, fire, and smoke damage, beginning with the Southern-most first floor window, continuing up to the second and third floors, and continuing North to the end of the building. The Southern-most first floor window itself showed significant signs of fire and heat damage. An analysis of this damage was indicative of a heat source originating from inside the building and venting out the Southern-most first floor window on the Western facing wall (Side B). There were distinct diagonal lines of demarcation coming from the Southern-most first floor window on the Western facing wall in a "V" pattern, showing high heat, and uniform damage. An analysis of this damage was indicative of a heat source originating inside the building and venting out the Southern-most first floor window on the Western facing wall.

Continuing North along the exterior Western facing wall (Side B) up to the exterior Rear corner of the building (Side C) extensive fire



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damage was observed to the other windows and exposed wooden façade. The damage to the Southern-most first floor window on the Western facing wall was significantly deeper and more extensive in comparison to other windows located on the exterior Western facing wall of the building (Side B).

Moving to the rear North facing exterior wall of the building (Side C), which adjoins to a fully enclosed backyard with a shed structure protected by wooden stockade-style fencing and gate, I noted the exterior brick façade was otherwise unremarkable with no visible signs of fire or smoke damage observed. The shed structure was also examined and found to be unremarkable with no fire or smoke damage noted. The open backyard area was found heavily congested with construction materials and household debris which had been placed there prior to the fire and was unaffected.

Continuing clockwise around to the East or Eastern facing exterior wall of the building (Side D), which faces onto Hobart Avenue, the brick façade and exterior three-story wooden porches and staircase were uncompromised by the fire. The heaviest concentration of smoke staining was observed above the Southernmost doors and windows on Eastern facing wall of the building (Side D), on all three floors of the exterior wooden porches and staircase. There was a notable absence of smoke staining above the Northern most doors and windows of Eastern facing wall of the building (Side D), on all three floors including the exterior wooden fire escape and windows. Several of the Southernmost windows on Eastern facing wall on all three floors were broken/shatters as a result of the fire, fire suppression efforts, and/or overhaul by ACFD personnel. Notably the Northernmost windows on the Eastern facing wall on all three floors were found intact and unremarkable.

These observations and findings as noted all demonstrate patterns of a heat source originating inside the first-floor Southernmost area on the West side (Side B) of the building, and spread up to the second and third floors on the West side (Side B), and into the attic area. The Western facing wall (Side B) sustained major fire damage inclusive of the second floor, third floor and attic space. These fire and heat patterns are consistent with an interior room achieving flashover.

I then proceeded to the interior portion of the fire scene to continue my examination, again attempting to identify areas least damaged and progressing to areas of greater damage, with the understanding that the area of origin is sometimes located in an area displaying lesser damage.

Based on the external examination as previously outlined, I had already determined that the area of fire was in the first floor South-Southwestern most (25%) quadrant on West side (Side B) of the building. However, I did examine and document the remaining quadrants of the building. Although fire had progressed and extended throughout the first-floor front partitioned apartment, I noted lesser thermal and smoke damage to the walls and content as I moved North through the interior into the first-floor rear apartment. The rear apartment did not achieve flashover or sustain significant heat or fire damage. Smoke staining was visible along with water damage resulting from fire suppression.

All fire damage analyzed was consistent with a single point of origin, emanating from the interior South – Southwestern quadrant of the building on the first floor.

FIRE SPREAD SCENARIO

An unintentional fire act occurred in the South – Southwestern quadrant of the building on the first floor. An open rear door of the first-floor front apartment located on the Eastern facing wall (Side D) provided ample oxygen creating a flow path allowing the fire to become fully developed. The fire spread through established methods of heat transfer to other areas of the building. The overall fire load of the building was greater than normal due to hoarder-like situations based on the number of occupants residing throughout the entire building. Once the fire breached the interior staircase and voids in the interior Western Facing wall (Side B), it was allowed to travel unobstructed through the voids to the upper floors and attic space of the building.

EXPOSURES

The detached exposed residence located directly West of the fire building suffered significant damage from the effects of heat, fire and smoke. The fire damage to the residence consisted of extensive melting to the vinyl siding and charring to the wood beneath the vinyl siding. Fire also breached into the attic of the residence causing fire damage through same. This fire damage was caused by fire venting from the adjacent building at 1809-11 Hummock Avenue.

REVIEW OF VIDEO SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE

A review of the video surveillance footage recorded by the Atlantic City Police Department ACHILES Surveillance Center showed the progression of the fire from limited angles and distances. Video showed the initial show of smoke emanating from first floor middle door/transom on the exterior front of the building Southernmost facing wall (Side A).



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The fire traveled up the interior Western facing wall of the building (Side B) to the second and third floors into the attic area. No additional video was available to be viewed from any other vantage points.

REASONABLE HYPOTHESES CONSIDERED

Electrical Causation

The utility that provided electrical service to the building is Atlantic Electric. A representative from Atlantic Electric responded at the request of the Atlantic City Fire department during fire suppression efforts. It was learned that there were no primary circuit reclosers or activations, and no trouble call for this property prior to their dispatch to the scene. This would indicate the primary grid within the area did not experience any abnormal electrical events prior to the fire's discovery. This information was obtained from Atlantic City Electric.

There were three individual electrical panels located on the interior Northern wall of the first-floor front apartment. The load center had multiple tripped breakers which were found in the tripped/off position which is not uncommon for this size of fire. The identification of tripped/faulted circuit breakers in an area not associated with significant thermal damage, or structural collapse is indicative of the circuits being energized when impacted by fire or heat.

During the investigation multiple extension cords and power strips were in the area of origin, with additional extension cords running from the power strip to other areas of the apartment. Given this configuration an overloaded electrical circuit cannot be eliminated as a potential ignition source.

This hypothesis cannot be eliminated.

Improper Disposal of Smoking Materials / Drug Paraphernalia

With the exception of a single intact vape pen and a single capped hypodermic syringe, no smoking materials, controlled dangerous substances, or additional drug paraphernalia were found in the room of origin inside the first-floor apartment. However, during interview the identified occupant of the first-floor apartment admitted to being smokers and users of illegal drugs. An improperly discarded cigarette or drug paraphernalia are capable of igniting thermally thin materials within a period of time of being discarded. Cigarettes, other smoking materials, illegal drugs, and drug paraphernalia located inside the room of origin would have been completely consumed due to the flashover.

This hypothesis cannot be eliminated.

Incendiary – Exterior of Structure

The scene examination excluded exterior to interior fire progression as part of the origin and cause investigation. The fire patterns observed on the Western facing exterior wall (Side B), and the first-floor Southernmost window on the Western facing wall (Side B) were consistent with a fire originating on the interior and progressing out of the window to the exterior of the building. I would also have noted different heat and fire patterns, with consistently more charring to the exterior Western facing Wall (Side B) had this fire started on the exterior of the structure and progressed to the interior.

This hypothesis has been eliminated.

CONCLUSION

Based on the examination of the fire scene all natural sources of ignition have been thoroughly and completely examined and has been eliminated as having any role or involvement in the origin and cause of this fire.

CLASSIFICATION OF FIRE

ORIGIN: Based on the observations of fire patterns, the West-Southwestern quadrant of the interior first floor front apartment was identified as the point of origin for this fire.

CAUSE: Undetermined – Based on the inability to rule out multiple hypotheses considered, and the amount of fire damage in the room of origin, this fire will be labeled undetermined.



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Rauch, Joe, Lead Investigator

Investigation Supervisor