

---

# FireFightingNews.com

---

## Minneapolis Apartment Explosion Injures 13

January 2, 2014

**Minnesota** - Six people remained in critical condition Wednesday night after an explosion caused an early-morning fire at a three-story building in Minneapolis Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. At least 14 people were injured.

One neighborhood resident watched the blaze from the third floor of a Riverside Plaza apartment building, where he could see the back of the burning building, which housed a grocery store and apartments above. Barry Peterson, 51, said the roof of the building collapsed about 10:45 a.m.

"We just saw a lot of fire and then a lot of smoke," he said, adding that the blazes were "steady."

The fire department was unable to determine as of Wednesday afternoon whether everyone made it out of the building.

Minneapolis Fire Chief John Fruetel said it isn't known how many people were in the brick building when the fire broke out at 8:16 a.m., so it hasn't been determined how many need to be located. He said it's possible there were people still inside.

Inspectors were examining the structure Wednesday morning, but Fruetel said at a news conference that afternoon at the Brian Coyle Community Center that it was too early to tell what caused the explosion and fire.

The building at 516 Cedar Ave., which is next door to the Masjid Dar Al-Hijrah mosque and in the same block as Palmer's Bar, is believed to be a total loss. Fruetel said it's possible the building could collapse. It was last inspected in 2012 and had no outstanding inspection issues, according to the fire department.

In an audio file of the police call that reported the fire, an officer could be heard saying that people were jumping from second-floor windows and that injured residents were on the street.

"It's not clear whether people were pushed out of the building from the explosion or whether they fell or jumped out of windows to escape," said Robert Ball, a spokesman for Hennepin County Emergency Medical Services.

Ten people, including three who were still in critical condition Wednesday night, were being treated at Hennepin County Medical Center. Hospital spokeswoman Christine Hill said all were suffering from burns, broken bones or both.

Three of the victims were transported to the University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview. A Fairview spokeswoman said Wednesday night that the conditions of the patients are not being released.

Fruetel said flames were shooting as high as 20 feet from the windows of the building's second and third floors when fire crews arrived.

More than 50 firefighters were on the scene throughout the day, according to the fire department.

When firefighters arrived, heavy smoke and fire were coming from the second and third floors of the building, the fire department's news release said. Several injured people who had escaped the burning building were standing outside.

Firefighters rescued victims from the building and made progress combating the blaze on the first floor, although they had to evacuate because of the "volume of fire and the structural integrity of the building," the news release said. Fire crews then fought the fire from outside the building. The release said a second alarm was called at 8:22 a.m. and a third at 8:33 a.m. There were no injuries among firefighters.

Roughly an hour and a half after the explosion, smoke from the fire clouded the neighborhood and the stretch of Interstate 94 that runs perpendicular to Cedar Avenue.

An American Red Cross disaster team captain said the organization was helping people at the hospitals as well as residents who were not home at the time of the disaster. He said they were providing victims with temporary housing, food and clothing as needed.

The morning's temperatures of about 10 below hindered firefighting efforts, making it difficult to draw water from

fire hydrants or avoid falling on ice and posing a danger to firefighters as they quickly transitioned from frigid weather to significant heat closer to the blaze.

"I know we've had a number of trips and falls but no reported injuries (to firefighters), which is remarkable," Fruetel said.

Mist and water from the fire hoses coated the crews' ladders, the exterior of the building and nearby trees. On at least two occasions, large branches became so burdened with ice that they broke from the trees and fell onto Cedar Avenue.

By 11:30 a.m., it appeared that active efforts to control the fire had largely concluded, although firefighters still were unable to enter the building Wednesday afternoon because of heat, smoke and possible structural damage. By 5 p.m. the building resembled a burning icicle; smoke billowed from the top and a mural on the south side of the building was covered in ice.

Mayor R.T. Rybak and Mayor-elect Betsy Hodges visited the scene Wednesday morning and spoke at the news conference in the afternoon.

"This is a community that's been through a lot," Rybak said. "People who come to live in this part of our city often have gone through horrendous things. They come here for peace and for safety. It's especially tragic to think that people who have come through so much now have to go through even more."

"I know that all the folks in the city of Minneapolis are ready and waiting and willing to come together to help the folks that have been affected by this tragedy," Hodges said.

Farah Ahmed said his brother, his uncle and his friends own Otanga Grocery, which was consumed by the blaze.

"(The grocery store) was a center of communication. It was a center of gathering," Ahmed said at the news conference. "We came from East Africa and we made it. We did start from scratch and we will make it again, with your support."

Mubashir Jeilani, a nephew of three of the store's owners who lives in an apartment nearby, said the grocery store was more than a business; it was a "connected market."

"People had tabs there," the 18-year-old said. "People came there to socialize."

Abdisalam Adam, board chair of the Islamic Civic Society of America, which operates the mosque, said the fire didn't damage the mosque, although it no longer has electricity and there was water damage, which Adam thinks was caused by fire hoses. He said he is concerned about the pipes freezing. Until the building passes inspection, mosque services will be held at the Brian Coyle Center.

The Salvation Army Northern Division was working with first responders at the-scene and tweeted that it was "preparing to serve families as needed."

Nick Woltman and C.J. Sinner contributed to this report.

Photos by Elizabeth Flores

Written by Saint Paul Pioneer Press

**FireFightingNews.com - FireFighter Owned and Operated**  
©2014 e-Firefighter, LLC - All Rights Reserved.