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Baton Rouge Three Alarm Apartment Fire

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Officials responded to a three alarm fire at an apartment complex near downtown Baton Rouge that left dozens of people without a place to stay, including some senior citizens. The Baton Rouge Fire Department reported the Turner Plaza Apartments on North Street caught fire around 1:30 p.m. The East Baton Rouge Council on Aging has a senior center at the site. The complex is operated by the East Baton Rouge Housing Authority.

A spokesman for BRFD said one person, who was inside the apartment where the fire started, was taken for treatment, but there are no other injuries. The Council on Aging said the fire displaced 40 residents, some of them elderly and disabled.

"I'm mad as hell; I lost everything," one woman said. "My little niece said she heard somebody say something about a fire and she ran outside."

Investigators believe the fire started in a bedroom near a heater. The fire then spread from the second floor to multiple units on the third floor. Shortly afterwards, a part of the roof collapsed. The total damage is estimated to be $1.25 million.

Malia Lebeuf, who lives on the same floor where the fire started, considers herself lucky to be alive.

"I smelled smoke, but I had just got through cooking and thought I left the stove on," Lebeuf said. "I checked to see if it was off and heard yelling and the sound of something crumbling. I poked my head out and saw black smoke and heard someone tell me to come out."

Lebeuf added she panicked for a moment because she didn't know what was going on. She said she then grabbed her cell phone and ran out of the building.

"I could see fire from the second floor on up. I think I was the last person to come out. If someone hadn't yelled, I'd probably still be in the apartment. It's scary. I kind of cried. I almost died," she explained.

In February of 2007, 41 people were placed in a Baton Rouge shelter after a huge fire broke out at the same apartment complex. That blaze caused nearly $1 million in damage. Firefighters said in the first fire, a maintenance worker doing plumbing work accidentally drilled into a gas line, sparking the fire.

The American Red Cross reported it is helping the residents of the complex. Volunteers are providing blankets, water and snacks for victims. Officials with the Red Cross added a shelter has been opened for those misplaced by the fire and 10 people stayed there Wednesday night.

The Council on Aging announced it will be collecting new and gently used household items, personal care items and clothing for the displaced residents. Donated items may be dropped off starting Thursday at 8 a.m. at the EBR Council on Aging's main location at 5790 Florida Boulevard.

Written by Andrew Nomura

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