



**Washington Township Fire Department  
Fire Investigation Origin and Cause Report**



**Incident Number #21-000566  
Address: 5281 Locust Hill Lane, Dublin, Ohio  
Date: February 10, 2021  
Time: 00:16**

**Classification: Undetermined**

**Property Type: Multi-Family Dwelling**

**Property Usage: Residential Group R-4, Condition 2**

**Damage/Loss: 803,791.00**

**Property Owner: Scott Hamilton – Ottercreek Group LLC.**

**Property Occupant: N/A**

**Property Insurance: Liberty Mutual**

**Scene Examination:**

**INVESTIGATION: Day 1**

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 00:16 hours fire crews from the Washington Township Fire Department were dispatched on smoke coming from the roof of a residence at 5281 Locust Hill Lane. While Battalion 91 was responding, Battalion Chief Thomas Harris, was updated by dispatch of flames through the roof. Chief Harris upgraded the fire assignment to a working fire incident. Chief Harris reported that heavy fire and smoke showing upon his arrival at the scene. Shortly after firefighters began working on extinguishing the fire, Chief Harris requested that a fire investigator respond to the scene.

Investigator Scott Cantrell was contacted by the Northwest Regional Emergency Communications Center (NRECC), and advised that there had been a fire at this location and the incident commander was requesting he respond to the scene to assist in determining what had caused this fire. Investigator Cantrell was joined by Investigator Hamilton during the early morning hours of the investigation.

The involved structure is identified as a two-story multi-family group home under construction, with a partial basement and crawl space. The exterior of the residence is wood framed with wood siding. The roof is pitched with asphalt shingles. Utilities in the form of electricity and natural gas were functioning at the time of the incident. This structure faces north for the purpose of this report.

The fire scene examination was conducted in a systematic fashion by working clockwise around the exterior of the property and then from the area of least burn damage to the area of greatest burn damage.

Fire patterns were analyzed, fire debris examined, and numerous digital photographs were taken. The examination of the residence revealed fire patterns that were created by smoke, heat, and direct flame impingement on all levels. The area of origin is on the first floor of the residence. Damage from smoke, heat, and flames increase in intensity towards the main living area of the home, near the steps leading to the basement. The primary damage to the structure was central to the residence and extended from the first floor to the second floor. A large hole has burned through the first floor area of origin and into the basement.

The area of origin was deemed not safe to enter after the fire due to several holes and structural concerns. Ice accumulating from diminishing temperatures, in conjunction with suppression efforts, contributed as hazards for investigators. The basement was flooded with over four feet of water from fire extinguishment efforts, this water was removed from the structure after the structure thawed.

Investigators Cantrell and Hamilton spoke with the general contractor, Tom McMillon, who stated that six tradesmen were working on the day prior to the fire. He stated most of the work was on the second floor, which included wood trim and painting. He further stated that nothing unusual occurred during the work day. Mr. McMillon was the last to leave on the day prior to the fire, at approximately 16:30 hours. He received a call at approximately 02:12 hours from the Washington Township Fire Department informing him of the fire. Mr. McMillon was able to assist investigators by drawing on the building plans, a layout of items on the first floor of the residence. It should be noted that no items were reported within the area of origin.

Evidence was collected in the area of origin, in the main living room adjacent to the basement stairs. Sample 1 was taken from the basement under the first floor hole. Sample 2 was taken from the 1<sup>st</sup> floor subfloor at the edge of the hole. An accelerant detection canine from the Columbus Division of Fire was called to the scene and worked on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor areas that were safe to occupy. The canine gave no indication that there was a presence of ignitable liquids, and no additional samples were collected.

A Dublin Police unmanned aircraft, (drone) was requested to the scene to take aerial pictures of the scene and to utilize the drones thermal imagery.

The area of Locust Hill Lane and Dublin Road was canvassed for any information and or pictures or video from the fire. The 911 caller, Dene Sanfillipo is the property owner directly to the south of this incident address. She stated she was working late at her office in Dublin and upon driving home, discovered the fire and smoke coming from the roof of the home. She immediately called 911 upon this discovery.

The scene was released to the homeowners at 16:30hrs. Instruction was given to the homeowners to contact their insurance agent to have the scene secured and boarded to prevent any unwanted entry. Homeowners were asked not to disturb the scene until they spoke with their insurance agency.

## **INVESTIGATION: Day 2**

On February 11<sup>th</sup> Investigator Hamilton and Cantrell returned to the fire scene with written and verbal consent from the homeowner. The scene was further examined for an additional 1.5 hours. No further action was taken this day.

## **INVESTIGATION: Day 3**

On February 12<sup>th</sup> Investigator Hamilton and Investigator Cantrell returned to the fire scene again with written and verbal consent. During this examination the investigators met with Mark Schockman from Fire and Explosion Consultants (FEC), who was performing the fire investigation for the homeowner's insurance company. This was the first day the investigators were able to investigate the fire and photo document the basement level of the residence after the water was removed from this area.

During this examination it was found that fire from drop down was present beneath the large hole on the first floor. On examination of the lower level, the fire appeared to be high in the ceiling level of the basement and the top 2-3 feet of the exposed framing members.

The fire patterns in the structure are most intense on the first and second floors of the residence. However, there is a significant fire pattern that is noted on the basement wall that appears to trail downward from the first floor, near the edge of the large hole that was burnt through the floor. The Washington Township Fire Department investigators assisted Schockman with excavating through the fire debris on the basement level under the large hole which had burned through the first floor flooring, including the base of the drop down fire pattern left on wall. Numerous debris samples were taken at the floor level in this area by Schockman. The FEC investigator also had the residence secured until a joint scene examination with all interested parties could be scheduled.

## **INVESTIGATION: Day 4**

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> a joint scene examination was held by FEC's Mark Schockman which included an Electrical Engineer and multiple investigators from other construction trades. All parties had the opportunity to complete a scene examination individually. This is the first day that the scene was viewed without a layer of snow or ice over the remaining contents in the residence. During the examination the focus again turned to the first floor main living room near the large hole in the floor and the surrounding area of the area of origin. Because of the instability of the structure, boards covering the large windows of this room were removed, to allow the investigators to view more of this room from a safe location on the exterior of the property.

While viewing the first floor from the exterior, near the large windows a melted object, red in color was found melted to the floor. This item is consistent with a small gas can. Numerous photos were obtained of this object and measurements taken of its position on the floor. Upon removal of this item by an evidence technician from FEC, the object was found to have clean broken glass on the protected side or bottom of object. The object was packaged and sent to a lab by FEC for testing and identification.

Because of the extent of the fire damage, it was determined that the main floor would need to be completely excavated to the floor level, to evaluate the fire debris and burn patterns on the floor. It was agreed by all parties that shoring and safety rails would need to be installed on this level and below, to

safely complete the investigation. The house was secured by FEC and once the floor could be shored a final scene examination would be scheduled for this location.

After the Electrical Engineer examined the area of origin on this day, electricity was ruled out as a potential cause for this fire.

### **INVESTIGATION: Day 5**

On May 6<sup>th</sup> a final joint scene examination was held by FEC with multiple investigators from the construction trades present. Numerous photos were obtained during this examination. The secured house was opened by FEC. All parties had the opportunity to complete a scene examination individually. During the examination, information obtained during interviews of painters was followed up on.

Painters reportedly were staining wood trim at this property on the day before the fire. One painter had been working in a pool room unaffected by the fire, and the other had been working on the second floor bedroom above the main fire floor. All stain cans and trays with applicators were found in the locations where the painters stated they would be located and were documented. Spontaneous combustion from the improper disposal of the staining applicators, was eliminated at this time as a possible cause of this fire.

The focus again turned to the main living area on the first floor of the residence. FEC brought in an excavator to remove roof structures that posed a danger to the investigators. The excavator was also used to slowly sift and remove exterior walls and debris from the main fire floor. The debris was examined extensively with nothing remarkable located.

The first floor, main living area flooring was shoveled down to the bare subfloor and a fire hose was utilized to wash the floor to visualize any fire patterns that could be located. After washing down the entire main living area floor, irregular shaped burn patterns with varying degrees of intensity were located. These patterns are consistent with an ignitable liquid being poured in this location. A final sample of subfloor was collected by an evidence collection technician from FEC, and sent for analysis. At the conclusion of this day, the house was released by the insurance company to the owners, who were present for the final exam.

**CONCLUSION:**

Based upon the facts, evidence and information developed during the course of this investigation, it is the opinion of the Washington Township Fire Department's Fire Prevention Bureau that the fire originated on the first floor near the main living area. The classification of the fire at this time is undetermined, pending the evaluation and analysis of the materials previously collected.

The residential utilities i.e. electric and natural gas, as well as spontaneous combustion from improperly discard staining materials have been eliminated as potential causes for this fire.

The opinions and conclusions stated in this report are based upon the evidence and information available at the time of this investigation. These opinions and conclusions may be supplemented should additional information become available.

Report completed by:

Chad Hamilton –Fire Investigator