OBSERVATIONS FROM 11700 COLUMBIA PIKE

COMMENTARY BY LT. MATTHEW CARRIGAN, MCFRSCODE ENFORCEMENT AND INSPECTION
PICTURES BY CAPT. TONY RANKIN, MCFRS FS12B

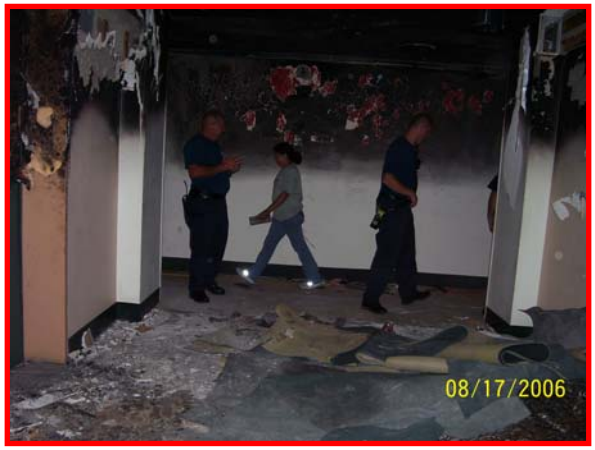
Building and Fire Description

The building is a 22 story residential hi rise of type I construction approximately 300 feet in length. There are three stairwells, one at each end of the hallway and one in the center of the building that discharges into the elevator lobby on each floor; all equipped with Class 1 standpipe risers. There is a partial sprinkler system in this building that protects the under ground parking only (***met code at the time the building was constructed***). All other common residential areas are not protected by the sprinkler system. There is no Knox Box at this building

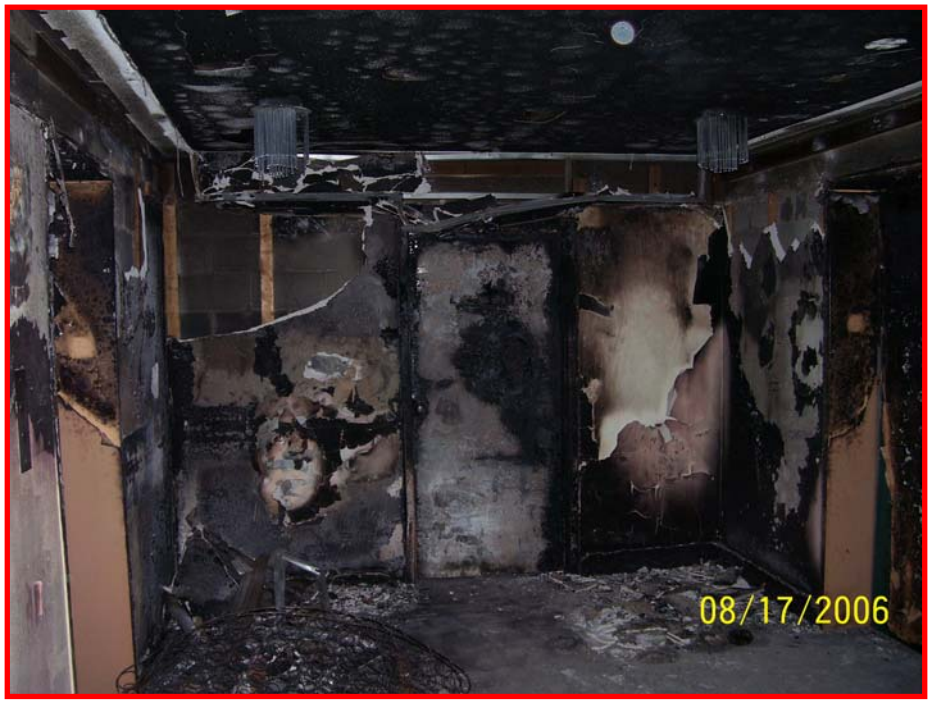
The fire occurred on August 16th, 2006 at approximately 1730 hours on the 13th floor elevator lobby. This fire started when a mattress that was being moved out of the building was left unattended was ignited by an unknown person, filling the 13th floor elevator lobby with high heat and dense smoke that extended down the hallway and stair towers. Heat generated by the mattress devastated the lobby area buckling the hoist way doors to one of the elevator shafts.

Fire Code Observations

At the time this building was constructed, it was not required to be fully sprinklered (NFPA 13). The alarm system is local or “ring & run” type that does not notify the Fire Department. Several of the various alarm bells on different floors did not work during a test after the fire. This could be related to fire damage as the center bell on the 13th floor was burned out of the wall; that may have affected other bells on the same wire.



When the sprinkler system was pumped, the connection in the wall just past the FDC started leaking and flooded the area on the other side of the wall including the basement area directly under the connection. The sprinkler and standpipe connections are blocked by a construction fence; four 150’ 3” lines were placed to support the FDC’s (***two to the standpipe & two to the sprinkler***).



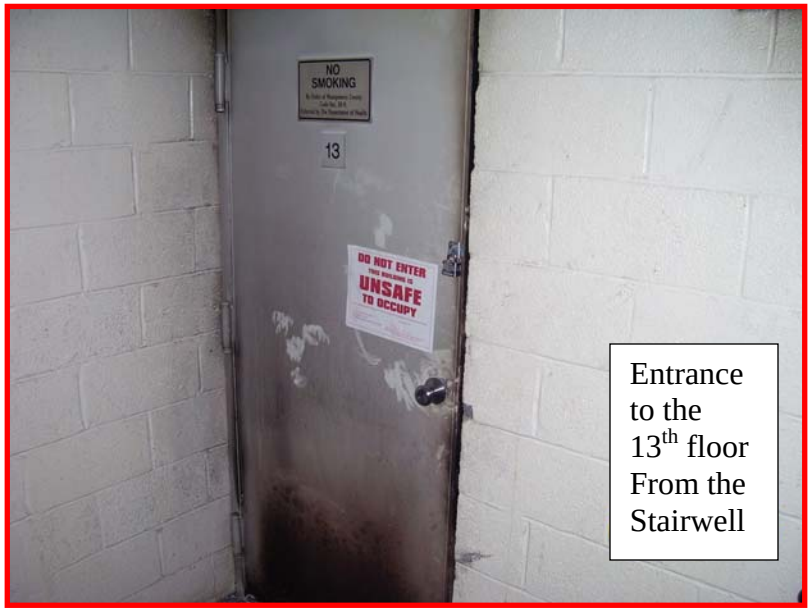
Tactical Considerations

There was a pull station activated on the 15th floor as indicated by the enunciator panel in the lobby. This is important to note because it is two floors above the actual fire floor. Had crews responded to the 15th floor as possibly indicated by the enunciator panel, taking the elevator to the 13th floor (***two floors below the fire***) may have ended with different circumstances.

As current policy dictates, elevators ***shall not*** be used if any of the following exists:

- no fireman service or fireman service not deemed reliable
- smoke in the elevator shaft
- fire on an unreported floor
- fire on or below the fifth floor.

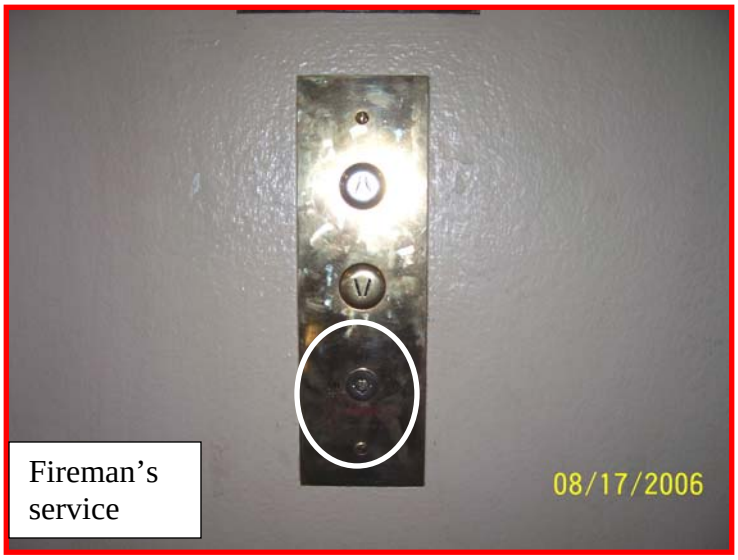
For a moment consider a fire on the 6th or 7th floor; your crew would still only get the benefit of riding the elevator to the 4th or 5th floor. The benefits of taking the stairs, to any floor, most certainly outweigh the risks associated with elevators. When walking the stairs the crew can look in and check conditions on all floors under the fire, acclimate themselves to standpipe locations, and familiarize themselves with the building layout. They can also determine which stairwell will be the safest for attack while accomplishing the most basic principle of interior fire attack, ***putting the first handline between the occupants/rescuers and the fire***. Most importantly, they may find the fire on a lower floor than reported.



Entrance to the 13th floor From the Stairwell

Imagine a call where smoke is reported on the 14th floor. Your crew enters a fireman service equipped elevator and proceeds to two floors below, the 12th. However you don't notice that there is no 13th floor. The smoke on the 14th floor may be a result of a fire on the floor below. What are the chances? If you haven't figured it out yet, ANYTHING can happen in this job. Remember that the pull station that was pulled at this fire was activated two floors above the fire floor. The only benefit of taking the elevator is that the crew does not have to climb steps. We have fought hard for a wellness program; use it to *your* advantage.

Elevators are dangerous and should be used with extreme caution if used at all. For your safety, you must have you face piece on, your cylinder turned on and your regulator in hand. Also, ensure the fireman service is working by testing it along the way and monitor the shaft for smoke.



Fireman's service