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## **Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service**

### **POST INCIDENT ANALYSIS**

**Townhouse Fire w/Rescue  
11939 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD**

**Incident Date: March 17, 2013**



**Submitted by  
Battalion Chief Mark E. Davis  
On April 14, 2013**

## **Incident Overview**

*Note: This post incident analysis (PIA) is based upon the review of the incident audio tape, interviews with crews who operated at the fire scene and the completion and review of PIA Unit Fact Sheets.*

On March 17, 2013, at 1403 hours, MCFRS units responded for a reported townhouse fire with people trapped at 11939 Old Columbia Pike in Company 12's first-due response district. Weather conditions at the time of incident were overcast with temperatures in the mid 40s and light winds.

Units arrived on the scene to find a 2-story, middle of the row townhouse with smoke showing from both levels on Side A. There was an adult female hanging out of a window on the second floor, Quadrant A. An adult male had already jumped from that same window prior to the arrival of fire/rescue units and was laying on the concrete pavement conscious but injured.

Units quickly went into the "rescue" mode of operation and deployed a ground ladder to rescue the trapped female while at the same time mounting an aggressive interior fire attack operation to support additional search and rescue efforts.

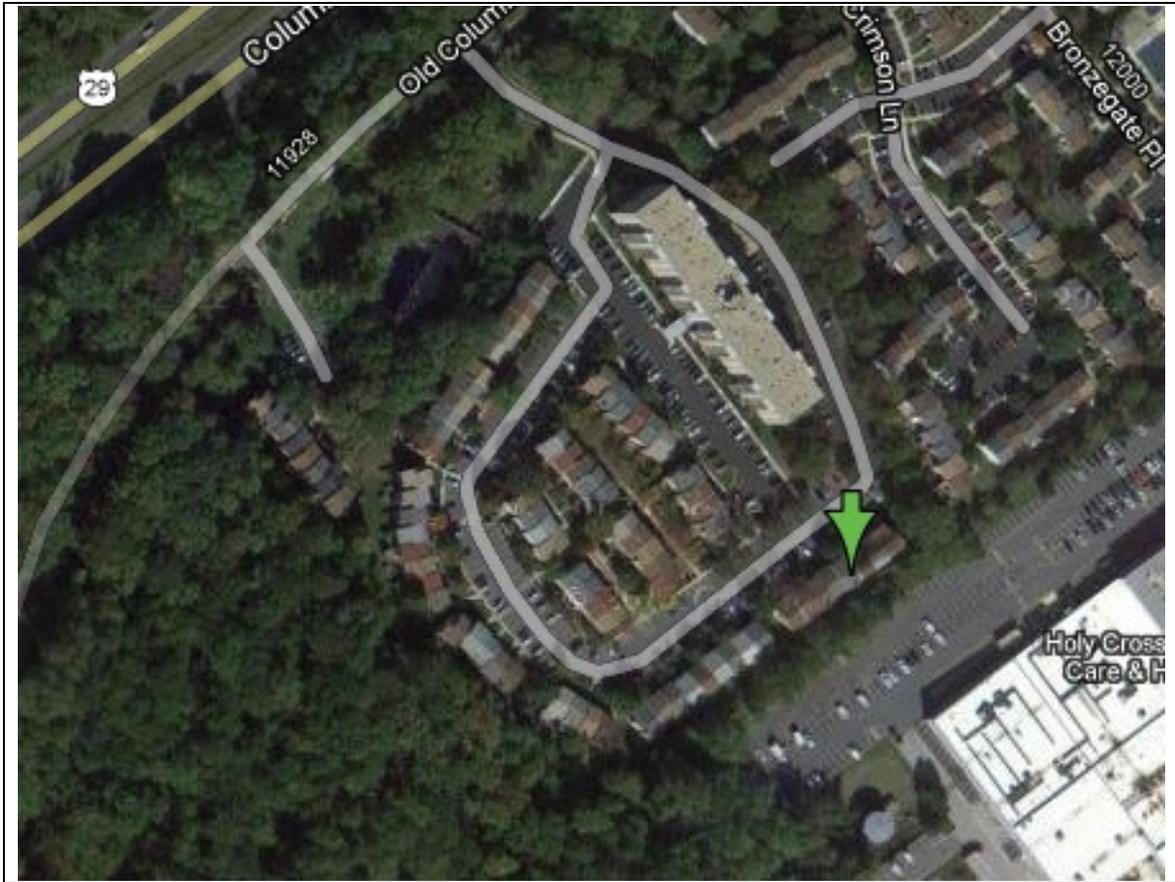
No additional occupants were found in the structure and the fire was controlled and extinguished using the initial box alarm assignment.

An origin and cause examination was conducted by MCFRS Fire and Explosive Investigations. The findings of that examination indicated that the fire started in the kitchen area of structure. The cause was listed as unattended cooking.

There were no injuries to fire/rescue personnel and the two occupants suffered non-life threatening injuries resulting in a short stay in the hospital.

## **Structure/Site Layout**

- The structure at 11939 Old Columbia Pike is part of a residential townhouse complex comprised of other similar style and constructed homes. Access to the complex is very limited.



The townhouse was located in the “far corner” of the complex. (Google Maps)

- The townhouse was approximately 1,000 square feet in size and was constructed in 1980. It was built of Type III construction with no fixed fire suppression systems.
- The layout of the house was typical of narrow width townhouses in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. The first floor was comprised of a kitchen, dining area, powder room, and living room – all in an “open floor plan” layout. The second floor had a master bedroom and bathroom plus two additional bedrooms and a bathroom. The basement was finished and had a bedroom and utility room.
- The open floor plan layout of the first floor allowed the fire to rapidly develop in the kitchen and cut-off the exit path for the occupants on the second floor, thus forcing one of them to jump out of a window in the master bedroom.



*The townhouse was “raised,” thus making the second floor level 2-1/2-stories high from street level.*



*The rear of the townhouse was a full 3-stories with a walkout basement entrance.*

- The walls that separated Exposure Bravo and Exposure Delta from the fire building were masonry block construction with no “poke-throughs” or penetrations. The presence of a masonry fire wall on the Bravo side

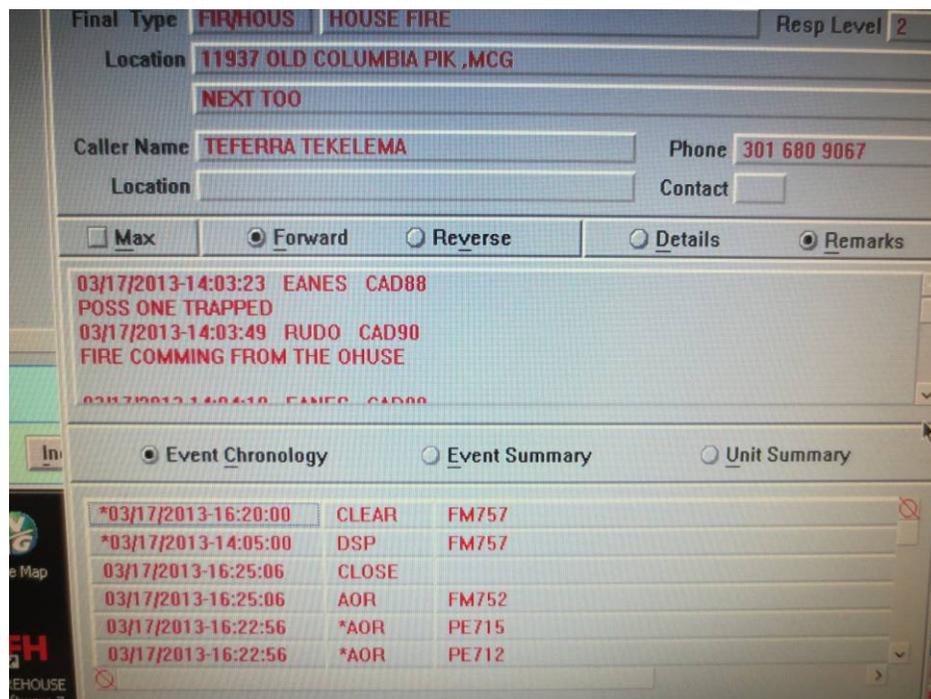
of the fire building made a significant contribution in preventing fire extension into the Bravo exposure – especially because the origin of the fire was in very close proximity to that masonry wall.

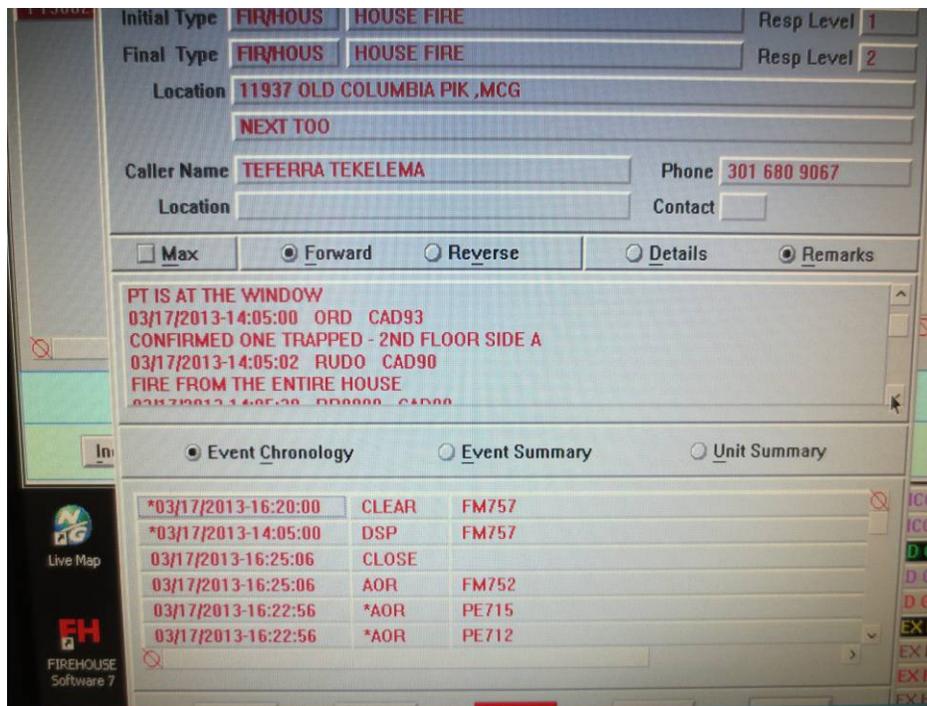
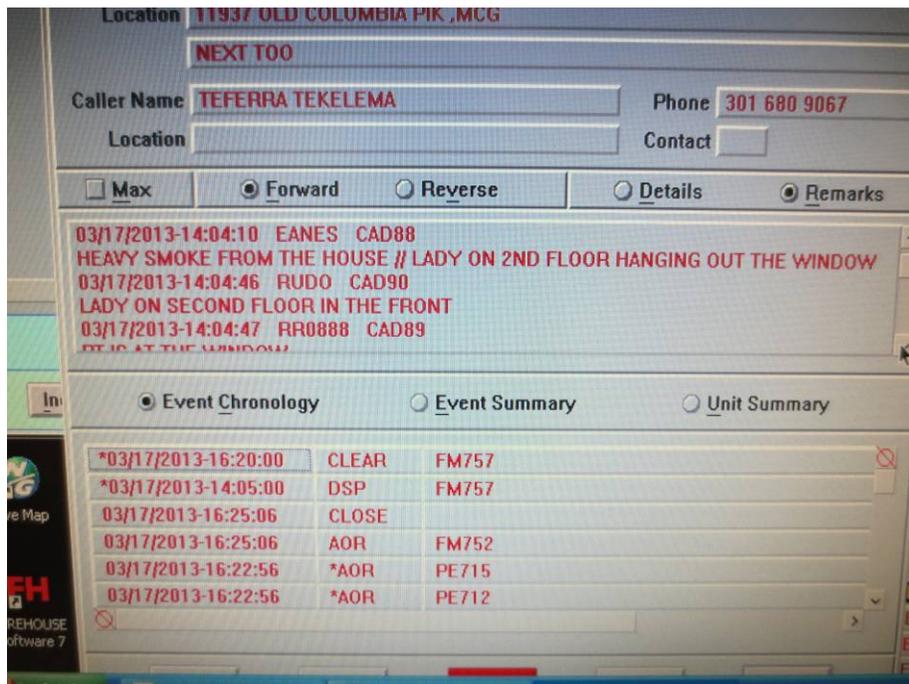
### Fire Code History

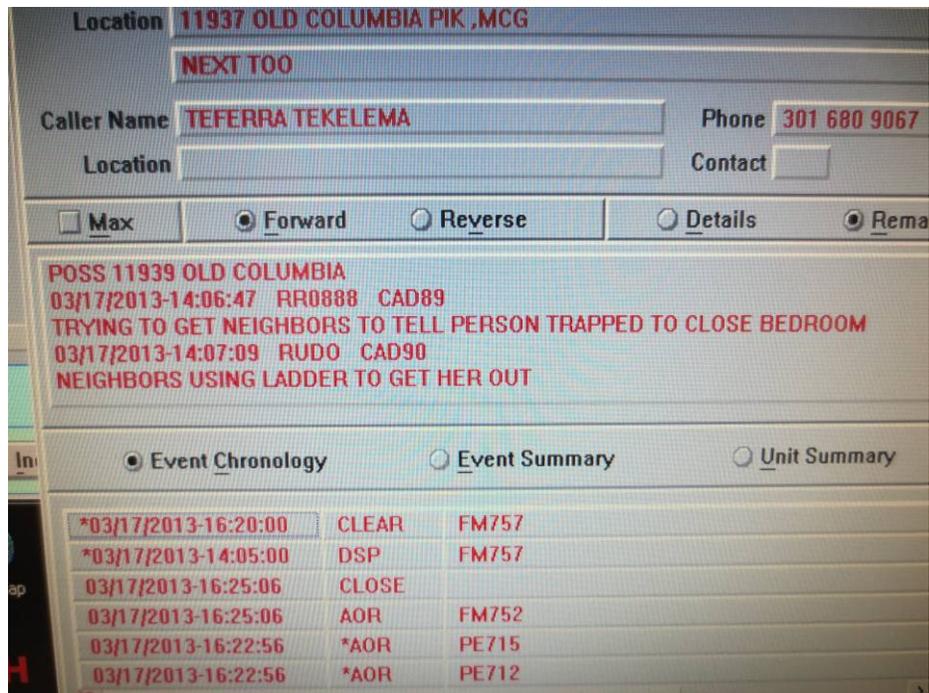
- A review of the past fire code requirements for the structure revealed no code compliance issues.
- However, MCFRS personnel found no working smoke detectors in structure at the time of the fire. Had there been, the occupants most likely would have been alerted to the fire much sooner than they were.
- It must also be noted that had the structure been protected by an automatic sprinkler system, the fire most likely would have been confined to the kitchen area and quite possibly extinguished prior to the arrival of MCFRS personnel.

### Communications

- The incident was dispatched for a townhouse fire with people trapped.
- Numerous updates were provided verbally by the 7-Charlie dispatcher while units were still enroute to the incident.
- Numerous updates were also provided via MDC updates while units were still enroute to the call.







- The 911-call takers did an outstanding job of handling the numerous 911 calls being received as well as working to keep the woman trapped on the second floor from jumping.
- In terms of incident operations, there were no radio communications issues and VRS was not needed or activated.

### Pre-Emergency Planning

- There were no pre-fire plans for the structure other than a complex map drawn by Station 12 personnel.
- The operations at this fire did not require any special pre-fire plans.

### On Scene Operations

- Battalion Chief 701 was the first unit to arrive on the scene – followed very closely by E712, E715, T715, and A712.
- BC701 confirmed the report of a “woman hanging out of a second-floor window” and arriving companies immediately went to work in the “rescue mode.”
- Truck 715 had a crew of six personnel and were able to quickly deploy ground ladders to the structure, rescue the trapped occupant, and place the aerial device in position for roof operations.
- Engine 712 stretched the first-attack line to the first-floor and initiated an interior fire attack in order to protect the crews involved in the rescue operation and to support an interior search operation.

- Engine 715's crew stretched a back-up attack line and assisted Truck 715 with the rescue of the occupant from the second floor window.
- Ambulance 712 initiated patient care for the adult male who had jumped prior to the arrival of fire/rescue units and along with M712, began patient care for the adult female who had been rescued via ground ladder.
- As additional units arrived on the scene, they were directed by command to either support fire attack and search operations in the fire building, support EMS operations for rescued occupants, or check for fire extension in the adjacent exposure properties.



*Adult female occupant is being rescued via ground ladder.*



*The window from which the male occupant jumped and the female occupant was rescued is shown above. Note the absence of smoke stains. The bedroom door had been closed until the male occupant opened it after having smelled smoke.*



*Patient care is started and crews make entry for fire attack.*



*Two attack lines (w/Class A foam solution) were stretched via the front door and were used to control the fire. A third line was stretched to rear of the structure but was not used in fire control operations.*



*Truck 716 handled laddering the rear of the townhouse even though there was no vehicle access.*

- After patient care activities were underway, Command was informed of the possibility of multiple occupants still in the structure. A 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm was transmitted and Command requested three additional EMS transport units.
- Search and rescue operations proved negative for any additional occupants: the occupants in question had left the residence prior to the fire occurring. They were eventually located by cell phone later in the incident and returned to the scene.

- The fire was placed under control by Command at 1429 hrs and with no additional victims being found, Command returned the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm units as well as the additional EMS units.



*Fire damage was significant in the kitchen area.*



*The concrete block wall prevented fire spread into the adjoining townhouse.*



*Heat levels on the second floor were high enough to melt this large screen television.*

### **Staging**

- Engine 718 was the first engine on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm and served as the Staging Manager.
- There were no issues with staging.

### **Support Functions**

- Rehab was established to the rear of the ICP in the parking lot and was handled by Medic 715.
- Canteen service was provided by Canteen 705.
- Breathing air replenishment was handled by Mobile Air Unit 716.
- Crews were relieved by fresh crews, or by crews leaving Rehab.
- Functions with outside agencies were properly coordinated (i.e. Police, Gas and Power Company,)

### **Safety Group**

- No Standby Team was announced because of the immediate need for rescues.
- Engine 841B was alerted as the 3<sup>rd</sup> due engine but was not available. The adjustment in engine company running order was not changed by the dispatcher until after several minutes had passed with units on the scene. Therefore, a Rapid Intervention

Company was not formed even though four engines were on the scene.

- Engine 716's Unit Officer volunteered his unit by radio as the RIC after they had arrived – originally as the 5<sup>th</sup> due engine.
- Safety 700 arrived late into the incident and served only in an advisory role regarding the release of the IDLH once the fire was brought under control.
- No MCFRS personnel suffered injury.

### **Accountability**

- No accountability board was used. Crews were accounted for by using the ICS tactical worksheet and the Daily Line-Ups carried in the BC701 car.
- An automatic, incident timer on the BC701 MDC was used to run a 15-minute incident duration reminder.

### **Investigations**

- The origin of fire was located in the kitchen area. The cause of the fire was determined to be unattended cooking.

### **Lessons Learned**

- The first arriving units – E712, E715, and T715 all had at least 4-person staffing levels. Truck 715 had a crew of six personnel. These units all arrived within about 60-seconds of each other which provided fourteen (14) fire/rescue providers that immediately went to work to rescue the trapped woman. Staffing levels clearly made a difference between being able to carry out just one or two critical tasks as opposed to the numerous tasks completed in the first couple minutes of this incident.
- When running with PGFD units in your response order, it is important to remember that the call is dispatched before PGFD is asked if the units are available. E841B was supposed to run as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Due engine (RIC) – the engine was not available and the running order announcement change was not noted early enough in the call. However, given the rescue scenario presented to first arriving companies, it is most probable that Command would have abandoned RIC and put them to work helping with the rescue effort.
- Command did not know that Truck 715 had a crew of six personnel until after the fire was brought under control. Command assumed that T715 had a crew of three personnel (minimum staffing) although was not surprised to learn of the additional staffing.

- As noted in previous PIAs by this author, the issue of unit staffing on volunteer staffed units is a difficult process to “get a hold of.” The Daily Line-ups carried by the career battalion chiefs rarely reflect the accurate staffing on the volunteer-staffed units and unless a unit officer states that he or she has more than three persons on a rescue squad or truck – Command has no way of knowing the staffing levels. In Prince Georges County – staffing levels are provided to the Incident Commander as soon as he arrives on the scene and assumes the command. A similar model is needed in MCFRS. Had Truck 715’s crew been involved in a MAYDAY event, Command would have been looking for three persons since there was no indication that staffing was any greater than minimum.
- The second battalion chief was late arriving and not used. Upon the arrival of the Duty Chief, he became part of the command team due to the potential escalation of the event and played a vital role in managing the additional talkgroup being used.
- Both T715 and RS715 were dispatched on the call, however, only T715 responded. Prior to the incident, RS715 had been on a call and T715 was left unstaffed at the station. Had this townhouse fire occurred during that time period, the ladder truck would have failed. The practice of cross-staffing the truck and rescue squad at Station 15 is a practice that can set the crews “up for failure” by having them constantly switch between units and drivers throughout the shift.
- RS715 failed on the response but was never replaced. ECC reported to command that RS715 was on scene, however, RS715 had never responded. This caused confusion over what rescue squad was assigned to what task – RID or fire attack.
- After the fire was out and crews learned about the lack of working smoke detectors, Command had crews check all of the townhouses in the effected row. Of the nine townhouses checked, seven did not have working smoke detectors, so crews installed the required detectors. Again, this finding reinforces the importance of the department’s Safety in the Neighborhood Program.

## Units on Incident

### 1<sup>st</sup> Alarm

E712, E715, E841B (not available), E724, E716  
T715, T716  
RS715 (failed – but not replaced)  
A712  
BC701  
BC704  
DC700  
C742  
SA700  
E719 (replaced E841B)

### RID

T831  
RS742B  
M712

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm ( Units not listed because they were never used.)

### Conclusion

This townhouse fire provides a good example of how staffing levels really make a difference when it comes to rescue and fire control functions. The woman who was rescued stated that she was just seconds away from jumping like her boyfriend did, but the quick action of the firefighters kept her from doing such. The incident also provides another good example of why company level personnel have to be able to execute the basics of hose line and ladder deployment. At this fire, deployment of those tools was critical to saving a life. Finally – the incident illustrates the constant need for smoke detector inspection and installation programs. All of the properties checked were rental properties – yet, they had no working smoke detectors.