

## **Explanatory Note to State Fire Marshal Office's Investigation Report of the Tilton Fire**

At the request of the NH State Fire Marshall, all names in his office's investigation report of the 2006 Tilton fire have been redacted with the exception of local and state government employees. The redacted names include the victims, the provider, and other non-government interviewees.

The following abbreviations or codes were used in place of actual names:

Home provider—Prov

Companion to Home Provider—Comp.

Resident with Developmental Disability who survived—Res. I

Deceased Resident with Developmental Disability residing on the first floor—MD\*

Deceased Resident with Developmental Disability residing on the second floor—BB\*

Neighbor—Neigh

Insurance Investigator—I.I.

Interviewee—Interv

Photographer—Photogr

Res.I's Caseworker—Caseworker/C.W.

\*Not individual's real initials.



NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE  
 BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS  
 33 HAZEN DRIVE  
 CONCORD, NH 03305  
 603-223-4289  
 Investigative Report

Case Number: 1060037  
 Investigator(s): Stark, Michael  
 Case Description: *PROU*. House Fire - FATAL

Print Date: 4/11/2011

**Details:**

On the date and time indicated I responded to a fire in Tilton that was reported to be a triple fatal. Upon my arrival I spoke to Deputy John Raymond who explained that three people were still unaccounted for, one had been pulled from the building, and the fifth resident of the house was at work when the fire came in.

*PROU* had left for her job at the Belknap County Nursing Home at 4:45 AM. When she left, the rest of the residents were still at home. Her companion *COMP* was awake when she left and was beginning his day. Together they cared for three developmentally disabled women, *RES I, BB, and MD*. *PROU* stated that all three women were asleep when she left.

When *PROU* left for work she traveled through the basement and then through the garage beneath the house. She reported nothing out of place in the basement. At 5:23 AM *COMP* made a call to 911 to report a fire. On the dispatch tape one can hear the smoke detectors going off. The digital recordings are available as part of this report. *PROU* reported that she knew there were smoke detectors on the first and second floor, and she thought there was one in the basement over near the furnace, but she did not know if they were interconnected. At the time that *PROU* moved in, NFPA 101, the Life Safety Code, 1981 ed. only required one electric smoke detector in a one and two family home (22.3.2.1).

*RES I* reported that *COMP* woke her up by shouting "Fire, fire" and that she saw red flames in the living room. It is unknown whether this is done before or after the call to 911, *COMP* says that there are still three people inside when asked by the dispatcher. *RES I*'s bedroom has a door directly to the outside and she was found by Officer Patten on the threshold from her room to the outside. She told Officer Patten that there were people still inside. *MD* was found at 12:45 PM in what was the area of the living room closest to the kitchen, near the stairs on the first floor. *MD* was found at 14:45 in the basement, but in an area consistent with the entrance to her bedroom which was on the first floor. She was found in a fetal position and the autopsy indicated a very high CO level in her blood. (Please see the medical examiner's report for more details) This would be consistent with her breathing the smoke for a long time, so I believe she may have been either scared and hiding or waiting for *COMP* come get her rather than exiting herself since she was found at what was the entrance to her bedroom. *BB* was found near the dog kennel that was in the second floor bedroom of *PROU* and *COMP*. Her bedroom is on the second floor and I was told by *inter* that she would have not listened to *COMP* and may have been going to that bedroom in order to find *PROU* or to retrieve the dog that is normally in that kennel. She also had a very high CO level which would be consistent with her breathing the gases for a long time. She was found at 3:15 PM.

While searching for the fire victims I observed the fire patterns and indicators left on the remaining portions of the house. The investigation was difficult because sections of the house remained on fire and were smoldering throughout the day. It was clear that the fire had broken through from the basement in the middle of the house. The kitchen and most of the living room floor sections were intact. In addition, early photos taken by *PHOTOGR* show heavy fire in the basement, but firefighters were able to walk on the first floor when they initially arrived. It was soon declared unsafe when FF Green reported the floor was spongy to command. Soon after that the evacuation signal was given and all firefighters were removed from the building. Based on these observations, it was easily determined that the area of origin was the basement. Please note that the photographs were requested from *PHOTOGR* and are included in the file.

As mentioned *PROU* walked through the basement when she left for work at 4:45 AM. *COMP* called in the fire at 5:23 AM, and if you tie this general time with when *RES I* is woken up by *PROU*, there is fire in the basement and traveling to the first floor in just over 30 minutes. The fire is found to be burning out the rear porch upon firefighter arrival, but this is consistent with *PROU*'s efforts to save some of the dogs that were on that porch. When he opened the doors and let the dogs out, he would have provided a large air supply to the fire causing it to grow rapidly in that direction.


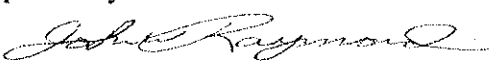
The investigation focused on the basement and what could have caused the fire. The house had at least three kerosene fueled heaters in it. At least two were clearly not in use. One that fell from the second floor and one found in the middle of the basement. The third, which was found in the basement under the living room, was unable to be determined whether it was in use. The heaters were documented with photos and were provided to *FI* who was investigating the fire for the insurance company as the State had no use for them. Even if in use, they did not readily appear to be the cause of the fire. It should be noted that *PROU* was warned not to use these heaters inside the house in the past, but held a permit for one to be used in the gazebo. Please see the permit attached to this report. In addition, *PROU*.

stated that these heaters were not in use and were just being stored.

Because of the extremely inclement weather, the scene was frozen solid by the time the victims were recovered. As such, we had to wait for warmer weather to dig through the rest of the basement. I returned again to the scene on March 20, 2006 with *J.I.* and an excavator. *J.I.* and I had met at the scene on March 3, 2006 and agreed to wait for the excavator to complete the work. When the basement was excavated it was clear that the dryer was not involved as the floor and walls were intact around it. The water heater and water pump were not involved as the wood that they were attached to were completely intact and virtually unharmed by flame. The walls behind the gas fireplace were mostly damaged by structural collapse. In addition, the chimney from the gas fireplace was lined and did not appear to be affected by the fire. The furnace was a forced hot air oil fired burner and was only damaged structurally. The furnace housing showed signs of high levels of heat, but these were consistent with being exposed to the fire from the outside. The interior portions of the furnace appeared unaffected. Most notably, the lower portions of the furnace housing were protected by debris from the structural collapse which indicated to me that the fire in the basement was high rather than low. The same indicators were found on the rear wall and the brick chimney. Based on this information and the reports from *RES. I* I believe that the fire began in the basement, and then traveled up the stairs to the door in the living room where she saw the flames *which she* woke up. In addition, I do believe that if there was a smoke detector in the basement, that it was not interconnected. If it had been and was working properly, *Comp.* would have been alerted to the fire much sooner than he was.

Although I am confident that the fire began in the basement, I am not sure what the cause was. The house is very old and was maintained very creatively. For example, on the front porch a closet was added, and rather than removing or moving the overhead light, a notch was made in the header and the light was kept in place. There were extension cords running all over the interior and exterior of the house. The washing machine simply drained out the back of the house rather than to a plumbed drain. I have to assume that the whole house was kept up in a similar fashion, and as such, the possibilities for electrical failures were great, but I could not determine one because of the extent of damage in the basement ceiling and the panel had been completely destroyed. In addition, since *Comp.* was awake at the time of the fire, he could have been involved in any number of activities that may have lead to this fire, but it is obviously something I cannot follow-up on.

At this time, the fire is labeled undetermined unless further information is provided.

Reporting Investigator Signature & ID #: 	Approved By: 
Date: 6/14/2006	Date: 6/15/2006

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NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE  
 BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS  
 33 HAZEN DRIVE  
 CONCORD, NH 03305  
 603-223-4289

Report of Interview

Case Number: 1060037  
 Investigator(s): Stark, Michael  
 Case Description: *Prou* House Fire - FATAL

Print Date: 4/11/2011

PERSON INTERVIEWED & REASON:

Name: *Prou* Street: 102 Lancaster Hill Road  
 Sex: Female City: Tilton  
 SS#: State: NH Zip: 03276  
 DOB: 3/28/1940  
 Race: Caucasian

Time of Interview: 02/28/06 9:00  
 Reason for Interviewing: *Prou* owned the home and was at work during fire.

Details:

On March 3rd, 2006 Investigator Stark was able to speak to *Prou*

Investigator Stark confirmed that when *Prou* left for work, she left through the basement. This would have been at about 4:45 AM, the call came in at 5:23 AM. She also stated that she thought that there was a smoke detector in the basement above the furnace, but she did not know if it was interconnected to the others. She also stated that they had not used the kerosene heaters inside the house.

*Prou* was asked what *MD* and *BB* were like. She said that they were both developmentally disabled, but *BB* was more disabled than *MD*. *MD* slept on the first floor and would have left if told to by *Comp*. *BB* was on the second floor and she would have been resistant to *Comp*.

Reporting Investigator Signature & ID #: <i>Michael R Stark</i>	Approved By: <i>John Raymond</i>
Date: 6/14/2006	Date: 6/15/2006



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Report of Interview

Case Number: 1060037  
 Investigator(s): Stark, Michael  
 Case Description: ~~Prox.~~ House Fire - FATAL

Print Date: 4/11/2011

PERSON INTERVIEWED & REASON:

Name: *Res. I.* Street: 102 Lancaster Hill Road  
 Sex: Female City: Tilton  
 SS#: State: NH Zip: 03276  
 DOB: 10/28/1970  
 Race: Caucasian

Time of Interview: 02/28/06 9:00  
 Reason for Interviewing: Beverly was home at the time of the fire.

Details:

Investigator Southwell spoke to *Res. I.* at the hospital. She is developmentally disabled so her information is fairly limited.

See Investigator Southwell's supplement for information about what *Res. I.* had to say.

Reporting Investigator Signature & ID #: <i>Michael Stark</i>	Approved By: <i>John Raymond</i>
Date: 6/14/2006	Date: 6/15/2006





**NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE  
BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS  
33 HAZEN DRIVE  
CONCORD, NH 03305  
603-223-4289**

**Report of Interview**

**Case Number:** 1060037  
**Investigator(s):** Stark, Michael  
**Case Description:** *Proud* House Fire - FATAL

**Print Date:** 4/11/2011

**PERSON INTERVIEWED & REASON:**

<b>Name:</b> Green, Fred	<b>Street:</b> 14 Gilmanton Road
<b>Sex:</b> Male	<b>City:</b> Belmont
<b>SS#:</b>	<b>State:</b> NH <b>Zip:</b> 03220
<b>DOB:</b>	
<b>Race:</b>	

**Time of Interview:** 03/03/06 14:00


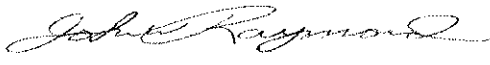
**Reason for Interviewing:** FF Green was one of the first in the house.

**Details:**

FF Green was part of the first crew into the structure during the firefighting operation.

FF Green told command that he found that the first floor was spongy and that it would not support firefighters for long, so an evacuation was ordered.

This is significant because the early photos show a large amount of fire in the basement. For this to happen and to have an intact first floor indicates that the origin is in the basement.

<b>Reporting Investigator Signature &amp; ID #:</b> 	<b>Approved By:</b> 
<b>Date:</b> 6/14/2006	<b>Date:</b> 6/15/2006

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NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE  
 BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS  
 33 HAZEN DRIVE  
 CONCORD, NH 03305  
 603-223-4289

Report of Interview

Case Number: 1060037  
 Investigator(s): Stark, Michael  
 Case Description: Pr.ou. House Fire - FATAL

Print Date: 4/11/2011

PERSON INTERVIEWED & REASON:

Name: Neigh Street: 127 Lancaster Hill Road  
 Sex: Male City: Tilton  
 SS#: 003-30-0929 State: NH Zip: 03276  
 DOB: 7/23/1941  
 Race: Caucasian

Time of Interview: 06/14/06 13:13

Reason for Interviewing: Neigh is a neighbor and a convicted arsonist.

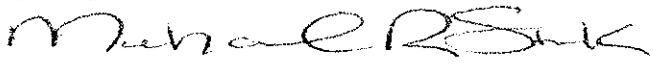

Details:

Neigh was quoted in the Union Leader as being a neighbor and that he awoke to the sound of firetrucks. Although normally insignificant, Neigh is a convicted arsonist and former fire officer. See the interview with Chief Paulsen for more information about Neigh background.

Neigh was contacted by me on the date and time indicated. I asked him what he remembered about the fire and he said he was awoken by an air horn at about 5:45 AM. He then realized that the air horn was part of an evacuation signal. When he looked out his front door he saw the police car. He spoke to the officer who explained what was happening. At the time he did not know if Comp was dead. He walked over to the scene to take a look but didn't do anything there or speak to anyone for ant length of time.

I explained to Neigh, that I knew of a Neigh, that was a convicted arsonist. I then asked him if he was one in the same. He was very cooperative and said that he was. He mentioned that the counseling had dome him a great deal of service.

There is no reason to belive that this fire is incendiary, so I thanked Neigh for his time.

Reporting Investigator Signature & ID #: 	Approved By: 
Date: 6/14/2006	Date: 6/15/2006





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 33 HAZEN DRIVE  
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Report of Interview

Case Number: 1060037  
 Investigator(s): Stark, Michael  
 Case Description: *PROU* House Fire - FATAL

Print Date: 4/11/2011

PERSON INTERVIEWED & REASON:

Name: Paulsen, Harold Street: Pembroke Street  
 Sex: Male City: Pembroke  
 SS#: State: NH Zip: 03275  
 DOB:  
 Race: Caucasian

Time of Interview: 05/01/06 15:00  
 Reason for Interviewing: Chief Paulsen had information about a neighbor.

Details:

Chief Paulsen wanted to pass on to our office information about a neighbor on Lancaster Hill Road in Tilton.

Chief Paulsen is currently the fire chief of the Pembroke Fire Department. He was contacted by [redacted] the wife of the late and former fire chief of Pembroke. Mrs. [redacted] said that she read a witness account in the Union Leader that was attributed to a man named *Neigh*. What he said jogged her memory about another *Neigh* who had been convicted of arson some time ago.

Chief Paulsen explained that *Neigh* was a captain on the Pembroke Fire Department and one of his employees at his full-time business back in the 1970's. In 1976, *Neigh* was arrested and charged with a number of arsons in the town of Pembroke and surrounding area. It was discovered that *Neigh* was setting the fires so that he may look like a good incident commander when he responded. The charges were dropped due to technicalities at court. He was later arrested for fires that he set in the White Mountains and was sentenced to time in federal prison.

Chief Paulsen thought that *Neigh* was sentenced to two years, and thought he was in the Belmont area after prison. Chief Paulsen added that any of the building fires that *Neigh* had set were always set on the outside of the structure. I explained the Tilton situation to Chief Paulsen and he said he didn't believe that *Neigh* could have done the fire as I explained it.

Reporting Investigator Signature & ID #: <i>Michael R Stark</i>	Approved By: <i>John Raymond</i>
Date: 6/14/2006	Date: 6/15/2006



NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE  
 BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS  
 33 HAZEN DRIVE  
 CONCORD, NH 03305  
 603-223-4289

Investigative Report Supplement

Case Number: 1060037  
 Investigator(s): Michael Stark  
 Case Description: *PROU* House Fire - FATAL

Print Date: 4/11/2011

Author: Southwell, John

3/24/06 8:58

Details:  
 Tuesday Feb.28, 2006, responded to the town of Tilton reference a triple fatal fire.

Directed to respond first to Lakes Region Hospital and interview a female, which had been transported from the fire scene.

Upon arrival at Lakes Region Hospital I made contact with hospital staff and was introduced to

*RES I*  
 DOB 10-28-1970

Miss Green who lived at the home of:

*PROU.*  
 102 LANCASTER HILL RD.  
 TILTON NH

And

*COMP*  
 102 LANCASTER HILL RD.  
 TILTON NH

Informed me that she had been in bed on the first floor of the home and awoke to smoke, *Comp*elling fire, fire. She stated that she saw red flames on the living room floor. She described the flames as 5 to 6 feet high; she also described the smoke she was seeing as black smoke. She was out side barefoot in her nightclothes when found by Tilton PD. I observed soot on hands and feet. Soot appeared to be "oily black" in color

At the Hospital I met

*Case worker CW.*

603-286-2438- EX # 13

*CW* is *RES I* caseworker; *RES I* is both physically and mentally challenged.

I also spoke with *PROU.* at the Tilton Police Station. Detective Michael Farrington of the Tilton Police Department was also present and taped the interview.

Briefly *PROU.* stated that she got up made a single cup of coffee with an electric single cup coffee maker, brushed her hair and teeth, readied herself for work and left at approx.0450am for work. She stated that she worked at the Belknap County Nursing Home in Laconia NH. having been employed there sense 1978.

She knew of no problems at the home, lights, electrical and heating. No construction going on in the past months.

She also informed me that the other two occupants living in the home were;

*MD*  
*BB*

They too were depended on assist care.

MD was reportedly sleeping in a first floor bedroom and BB sleeping in a second floor bedroom when Prou went to work.

She also informed me that the home was heated with an oil fuel hot air furnace and propane fueled metal stove. . The kitchen stove was electric. The fireplace was not in use and had not been used for years.

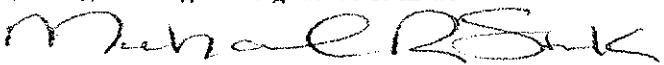

She stated the home was equipped with two electrically powered smoke detectors, one on the first floor and one on the second floor.

She stated no one smoked, everyone was a non-smoker.

She informed me that the interior of the first floor walls consisted of a pine board from floor to ceiling. The first floor was a combination of pine and hardwood floor covering and the ceiling was sheet-rock.

Second floor was a mix of carpet in some rooms and the "Prego" brand wood flooring.

I next went to the Lakes Region Dispatch center and listened to approx. 45 seconds of the initial call. I heard a male voice stating his house was on fire and that he was getting everyone out. In the background I could here a distinct buzzing sound similar to the sound of a smoke detector when activated.

<b>Reporting Investigator Signature &amp; ID #:</b> 	<b>Approved By:</b> 
<b>Date:</b> 6/14/2006	<b>Date:</b> 6/15/2006

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**NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE  
BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS**

33 HAZEN DRIVE  
CONCORD, NH 03305  
603-223-4289

**Case Action Report**

**Case Number:** 1060037  
**Investigator(s):** Michael Stark  
**Case Description:** *Presv.* House Fire - FATAL  
**County:** 001 - Belknap County

**Print Date:** 4/11/2011  
**Court/Hearing Date:**  
**This Action Closes Case:** No

**I. ADJUDICATION**

<b>Suspect Name:</b>	<b>Arrested By:</b>
<b>Sex:</b>	<b>Rank:</b>
<b>Race:</b>	<b>Badge #:</b>
<b>DOB:</b>	<b>Date of Arrest:</b>
<b>SS#:</b>	<b>Time of Arrest:</b>
<b>Address:</b>	<b>Charges Filed:</b>
<b>City:</b>	<b>State Statute:</b>
<b>State:</b>	<b>Proceeding Code:</b>
<b>Zip:</b>	<b>Action Code:</b>

**Sentence/Fine/Action:**

**Cases Cleared by Arrest: (List Each Case #)**

**II. STATUS CHANGE**

**Action Type:** Case Opened  
**Reason for Closing Case:** N/A

**Remarks:**

**Case Action Report**

**Case Number:** 1060037  
**Investigator(s):** Michael Stark  
**Case Description:** Ⓢ Ⓢ Ⓢ House Fire - FATAL  
**County:** 001 - Belknap County

**Print Date:** 4/11/2011  
**Court/Hearing Date:**  
**This Action Closes Case:** No

**I. ADJUDICATION**

<b>Suspect Name:</b>	<b>Arrested By:</b>
<b>Sex:</b>	<b>Rank:</b>
<b>Race:</b>	<b>Badge #:</b>
<b>DOB:</b>	<b>Date of Arrest:</b>
<b>SS#:</b>	<b>Time of Arrest:</b>
<b>Address:</b>	<b>Charges Filed:</b>
<b>City:</b>	<b>State Statute:</b>
<b>State:</b>	<b>Proceeding Code:</b>
<b>Zip:</b>	<b>Action Code:</b>

**Sentence/Fine/Action:**

**Cases Cleared by Arrest: (List Each Case #)**

**II. STATUS CHANGE**

**Action Type:** Change Cause Classification  
**Reason for Closing Case:** N/A

**Remarks:** This fire in undetermined unless further information is provided.

# Case Action Report

Case Number: 1060037  
Investigator(s): Michael Stark  
Case Description: 1000. House Fire - FATAL  
County: 001 - Belknap County

Print Date: 4/11/2011  
Court/Hearing Date:  
This Action Closes Case: Yes

## I. ADJUDICATION

Suspect Name: Arrested By:  
Sex: Rank:  
Race: Badge #:  
DOB: Date of Arrest:  
SS#: Time of Arrest:  
Address: Charges Filed:  
City: State Statute:  
State: Proceeding Code:  
Zip: Action Code:

Sentence/Fine/Action:

Cases Cleared by Arrest: (List Each Case #)

## II. STATUS CHANGE

Action Type: Case Closed  
Reason for Closing Case: Administrative Closing

Remarks: This case will be closed pending any further information.

Reporting Investigator Signature & ID #:

*Michael Stark*

Date: 6/14/2006

Approved By:

*John Raymond*

Date: 6/15/2006