

FILE CLOSED

Case Number

2014-001

Lead Investigator

Ron Rahman

State Fire Marshal Division

Department of Public Safety
444 Cedar Street, Suite 145
St. Paul, MN 55101-5145



Investigation Report

Confidentiality: Juvenile: ☐ Homicide: ☐ Confidential: ☐

Property

Name: Cedar Avenue Apartments

Address: 512 Cedar Avenue South

City: Minneapolis County: Hennepin State: MN Zip: 55454-

Phone: - - Contact Name: Garad Nor Contact Phone: 612-332-0666

Property Use Code: 429

Building Name: 512 Use Code: 429

Alarm Type: Detection - Smoke - Hardwired/Battery Sprinkler: None

Section Name: Interior Use code: 429

Alarm Type: Detection - Smoke - Hardwired/Battery Sprinkler: None

Incident Detail

Date: 01/01/2014 Time: 0800 Fire Type: Undetermined Fire Cause: Undetermined # Injuries: 15

Fire Dept.: Minneapolis FDID: 27218 Req. Agency: Minneapolis Police Arson Coop. Agency: Minneapolis Police Arson, MnOPS, Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office, Minneapolis Fire

Type of Occupancy: Apartment Complex, Grocery Store Pre Fire Value: \$ Loss: Total

Smoke Detector Performance: Unknown Sprinkler System Performance: None

Occupied: Yes: ☒ No: ☐

Disposition

Open: ☒ Closed: ☐ Referred to other agency: ☐ Referral Info:

Note: All fields underlined are required upon initial submission of this report.

Synopsis

An incident occurred with interior force sufficient to push window frame material out of the front (east) windows of the south third and possibly the middle of the affected structure into the southbound lane of Cedar Avenue. Fire was then showing out the eastern-most window of the south wall second level, along with the south and then middle windows of the east wall in the early stages of this incident. The smoke then turned from a lighter color gray to black very quickly and the amount also built very fast.

Subsequently, the entire roof and the entire interior of the south almost one-half of the structure interior collapsed. The remains of two deceased victims were eventually located in the debris.

Owner 1Check if Occupant: ☐

Last First Middle Fatality DOB Gender
 Garad Nor DBA Wadani Properties LLC ☐ / / Choose
 Address: CO: % BAC: Drugs: ☐
 City: Minneapolis State: MN Zip: -
 Phone: 612-332-0666 Contact Name: Contact Phone: 612-636-1203
 E-mail: School District #: Country:
 Blue indicates required fatality information. DOB is optional unless a fatality.

Owner 2Check if Occupant: ☐

Last First Middle Fatality DOB Gender
 Address: ☐ / / Choose
 CO: % BAC: Drugs: ☐
 City: State: Zip: -
 Phone: - - Contact Name: Contact Phone: - -
 E-mail: Country:
 Blue indicates required fatality information. DOB is optional unless a fatality.

Occupants

Last	First	Middle	DOB	Fatality	Gender	CO	BAC	Drugs
Ali	Ahmed	Farah	02/29/1956	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	M	45%		<input type="checkbox"/>
Farah	Mrimri	Jama	01/09/1953	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	M	46%		<input type="checkbox"/>
Adan	Abdiqani		01/01/1985	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	M	1%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>

Blue indicates required fatality information. DOB is optional unless a fatality.

Other Fatalities – Fire Fighters and Others

Last	First	Middle	DOB	Gender	FF/Other	CO	BAC	Drugs
			/ /	Choose	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	Choose	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	Choose	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	Choose	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>
			/ /	Choose	Choose	%		<input type="checkbox"/>

CO, BAC and Drugs only required if fatality is not a Fire Fighter

Insurance Record

Insurance Agency: Agent: Phone: - - City:
Insurance Co: Nautilus Insurance Company Policy Number: Inception Date: Expiration Date:
Amount of Policy: Unknown at this time Building: Contents: Other:
Claim Number: Payable to: Adjuster: Phone:
Remarks: Nautilus Insurance Company apparently provides only liability coverage on the affected property.

Narrative Report

People

Garad Nor, property owner, DBA Wadani Properties, LLC; 612-332-0666 (work), 612-636-1203 (cell)
Detective Sergeant Sean McKenna, Minneapolis Police Arson Squad
Investigator Gerald Schmidt, Minneapolis Fire Department
Mark Bishop, Prairieland Fire and Forensics, private fire investigator representing Centerpoint Energy
Assistant Chief Chuck Bryntesen, Minneapolis Fire Department
Patrick Donovan, MN Office of Pipeline Safety (MnOPS)

Background

On January 1, 2014, while examining an unrelated residential structure fire in Plymouth, a check of the computer for news-related articles revealed an explosion/fire in Minneapolis that occurred a short time prior on the same date. I made telephone contact with Minneapolis Police Detective Sergeant Sean McKenna to determine what had occurred and if he would need assistance. McKenna was interviewing injured persons at the time and he requested I respond to the scene, which I did.

Upon arriving at the scene, numerous Minneapolis Fire Department apparatus and firefighters were still actively fighting the fire at 512 Cedar Avenue South. This location is Cedar Avenue Apartments, a three-story structure from grade up, with apartments on levels two and three and a grocery store on level one. A basement is also incorporated. I met McKenna and Minneapolis Fire Department Investigator Gerald Schmidt a short time after my arrival. Numerous law enforcement officers were also on site providing scene security and performing any other needed tasks. I also subsequently met Mark Bishop, a private fire investigator with Prairieland Fire and Forensics, who was representing Centerpoint Energy.

Property Description

The affected property, which has other adjacent structures, is pie-shaped, with the narrower area of the property facing predominantly north. An open lot is south of the affected structure and adjacent structure to the west, and this property appears to be a small park. The affected property sets on the west side of Cedar Avenue.

The affected structure is constructed out of the common rectangular shape with somewhat of a "V" in the southeast corner to maximize the front of the structure that faces east and the south end. It is constructed of

four layers of brick on the exterior walls, with wood construction inside them. The roof is predominantly flat. The building sets predominantly north and south in length and is attached to the adjacent structure to the north; however there is an approximate eight foot opening between the west end of the affected structure and the structure farther west of it.

Windows are in the east, south and west walls. The south and west wall windows are the standard type that are flush with the brick walls. The east wall has windows that are flush on the first level and a combination of flush windows on the second and third levels and Venetian-style multiple windows. One set is in the north third, one set is in the middle area, and one set is in the south third of the structure's front.

Entrances to the structure are in the east wall and include two stairways, one along the north wall and one in the area between the south one-third and the middle one-third of the structure's interior. The main level also has a door in the north one-third that services the grocery store.

The house electrical service is powered by overhead wires to the south wall, close to the southeast corner. The natural gas meters and piping are serviced by underground piping from under Cedar Avenue. The meters and piping are in the basement level adjacent to the east (front) wall.

The interior locations of apartments and/or how many apartments were on each level are not known at this time; however a supplemental report will include that information when it becomes available.

Exterior Examination

The exterior visual examination on January 1, 2014 revealed the following:

- Fire department extinguishment activities continued through a majority of the day, with a call back for a hot spot in the nighttime hours.
- The main level east windows remained intact, along with the door to the grocery store.
- The upper level windows of the east, south and west walls were void of their original locations.
- The north section Venetian style window frames of the second and third levels remained intact and relatively unburned.
- The north section standard window frames remained intact and relatively unburned.
- The middle section Venetian style window frame was missing the second level set of window frames while the third level's frames remained intact.
- The middle section standard window frames remained intact and relatively unburned.
- The south section Venetian style window frames were destroyed and void of their original positions.
- The south section standard window frames were missing in the interior areas and the exterior frame areas were presently covered with ice from extinguishment operations.
- The south wall second and third level window frames exhibited fire damage and smoke continued to at least partially obscure this area.
- The west wall main level windows that could be seen remained intact.
- The second and third level windows that could be seen were broken and fire damaged.

- The roof appeared to be collapsed down into the structure the entire length and width of the structure.
- Visual examination through the north sector windows with the use of binoculars and then a camera revealed walls and ceilings still intact, and the areas that could be visually examined appeared to be relatively unburned.
- Visual examination through the middle sector windows exhibited partially remaining walls to the right (north) and collapsed areas to the left (south).
- Visual examination through the south sector exhibited only smoke and steam.
- When smoke and steam temporarily cleared from the south area, the interior sides of the west and south walls could be seen, showing collapse in this area.
- A crew from Centerpoint Energy attempting to dig a hole in the street in order to terminate natural gas service to the structure was noted.
- Patrick Donovan with MnOPS witnessed the digging and any testing being conducted.

The entire day of January 1 was spent conducting exterior examinations of the affected structure and adjacent structures, as entry to the affected structure could not be completed. The examination would continue on January 2.

On January 2, 2014, I returned to the scene and met McKenna, Schmidt, Donovan and Bishop. I also met Minneapolis Fire Department Assistant Chief Chuck Bryntesen.

During the later morning hours, a fire department aerial tower was used to gain visual examination of the structure's interior from above. Extensive ice buildup was noted in the middle and north sectors of the interior. Ice buildup was also noted in the south one-third; however it was not as pronounced as the middle and north sectors, as smoke was still coming from the south third, showing there was at least one hidden hot spot remaining in the debris of that area. The aerial unit was also utilized to determine if any missing victims may be spotted from above, which was unsuccessful.

Visual examination of the south exterior wall on this date also revealed the top one-third of the wall had collapsed through the middle of the building, east and west. This appeared to be the only area that sustained collapse and it was not known if this was a result of normal collapse or if it was assisted with large fire department master streams.

The City of Minneapolis Building Department had hired Kamish, a contractor from South St. Paul, to bring heavy equipment to the site in order to gain access to the structure and locate missing victims presumed to be inside. This equipment began arriving on this date, along with dump trucks hauling rock/gravel in order to build a ramp up to the east exterior wall of the structure for a track hoe's use. A small to mid-size track hoe began pushing the south one-third of the east wall in at the third level area. This operation began in the afternoon hours. Officials with the company stated a larger track hoe was on the way. The second level exterior brick was pulled outward below the original area where demolition began. The east half of the south wall was also pushed outward during these operations. The east wall was dismantled down to almost grade level in the south one-third of the structure.

Dismantling of the east wall continued to the north to the middle sector. Debris from inside the second level floor that remained intact was also being slowly removed to the outside. During this process, the remains that

would subsequently be identified as Ahmed Farah Ali were discovered. The operations were halted, the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office was contacted, and officials responded.

Interior Examination

After victim Ahmed Farah Ali was removed to the Medical Examiner's vehicle, a closer visual examination was conducted of the second level floor area after climbing to that level. Negative results were obtained relative to locating another victim in this area.

During the course of debris removal, two electrically-powered space heaters were located and visually examined. The space heaters were left on-site and the examination ended for the day.

On January 3, 2014, I returned to the site and met the same individuals again. A larger track hoe had arrived in the late afternoon hours of January 2, and that track hoe was now being utilized in the middle to north sectors of the structure's interior. During this process, a Minneapolis Fire Department Assistant Chief and I made access to the second and third levels of the north sector via the north stairway. This was done to determine if any other remains in that area could be located and retrieved. This occurred with negative results.

During this activity, it was noted there was only light to no fire involvement in the north sector's second level and stairway. Fire damage was noted on the third level; however the floor in that area remained intact. This area appeared in stark contrast to the south one-third of the structure's interior.

The track hoe began working in the south sector where the structure's interior was collapsed down into the basement level. Buckets of debris were slowly and carefully removed to the outside where the debris was slowly removed from the bucket each time while continuing the search for the missing victim.

In the later stages of this activity, remains that would subsequently be identified as Mirmri Jama Farah were located in the debris. Activities ceased and the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office was contacted to respond, which they did. Once the victim's remains were removed from the scene to the Medical Examiner's vehicle, activities resumed.

McKenna had earlier learned that a victim at the Hennepin County Medical Center's Burn Unit was not the person believed to be an occupant of the structure. Because of this, the potential for a third victim inside the debris existed. The great majority of all collapsed debris in the basement level of the structure's south one-third was removed and examined, with negative results. During this process, the natural gas meters and associated piping were not exhumed, nor were they seen through debris at this time.

A person with a two-year-old driver license with the address of 512 Cedar Avenue South, Minneapolis was found to have not resided at this location for almost two years, but the person had not apparently changed his driver license to his new address. With the search for potential missing victims completed, City of Minneapolis Building Department officials wanted the building's remains to be dismantled. Debris piled outside the structure as a result of locating and removing victims was presently moved back into the basement area of the structure via the use of the track hoe.

While the process of debris removal and removal of victim Mirmri Jama Farah's remains were being conducted, a visual observation in the basement level revealed a lighter amount of fire damage noted in the south sector of the basement, with wood fir strips for wall siding not fire-damaged at all. Also, the rear area of the grocery store's main level in the middle sector was not fire-damaged at all. Plastic containers were stacked up in a hallway adjacent to a large walk-in cooler and these were not distended. Boxes of breakfast cereal were noted on shelves in the front area of the store and these items also were not fire-damaged.

Evidence

I did not retain any evidentiary artifacts from the scene.

Photographs & Diagrams

Digital photographs were taken prior to and during the scene examination. A photo inventory of those photos I took is attached to this report. Due to the extensive collapse in the structure and the inability to gain access prior to collapse, a sketch is not included at this time.

Interviews & Investigation Activity

I did not conduct interviews to this point in the investigation. The scene activities related to visual observation and victim location/removal were foremost in the examination.

On January 7, 2014, I traveled to the State Fire Marshal Division St. Paul Central Office and met Pat Donovan. Donovan had obtained a copy of a video recording from an MTC Bus on its normal route and traveling south on Cedar Avenue in the early stages of the fire. We reviewed the digital recording and Donovan provided a copy to me.

On January 8, 2014, I traveled to Minneapolis Police Arson offices in Minneapolis and met Sean McKenna. McKenna provided me a copy of the digital recording from a MN State Trooper who was responding to the scene from the south on Cedar Avenue and had the dash camera operating. That recording was also reviewed.

After reviewing both recordings, it appears the second level east window in the south wall is blowing fire out of it in very early stages, even more than what is appearing out the east wall second level windows as the State Trooper pulled up and arrived. Also, the smoke appeared light in color at first and then built to a dark color very fast in both videos, especially the MTC Bus from the north.

Conclusion

As of the date of this report, essentially the only activity conducted at the scene was for rescue and recovery operations of victims. The origin/cause in-depth examination has not yet begun and this will depend on both the insurance carriers for the liability coverage carrier, Centerpoint Energy, and any other carriers as yet not known. Because of this, the cause of this fire will remain presently Undetermined. This case will also remain in the open disposition presently.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Rahman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ronald C. Rahman

Deputy State Fire Marshal – Investigator

Date Submitted: 1-10-14

Attachments

1. Photo Inventory

**Photo Inventory
Case No. 2014-001**

The photos for the following descriptions were taken on 1-1-14 and are marked 2014-001 on the photo CD.

1. Looking south at the affected building on the right side of the street partially covered in ice.
2. Looking west at the front of the structure. The street is predominantly clear of debris that was forced out of windows as firefighters moved it to east of the street early on in the incident.
3. Different view also showing Centerpoint officials in digging process to cap gas line.
4. Looking northeast at the front and south walls.
5. Different view showing more of the south wall embedded in smoke and steam.
6. Left of prior photo.
7. Above prior photo.
8. Left of photo 6.
9. Looking south at the north end of the pie shaped property and adjacent structure.
10. Right of prior photo showing area west of the structures looking south.
11. Looking east at front of structure just west of the affected structure.
12. Right of prior photo.
13. Right of prior photo showing gas meter and piping right of wrought iron railing.
14. Different view of gas meter and piping.
15. Close view.
16. West and south walls of adjacent structure to the west and small space between the rear of it and the rear of the affected structure to the right.
17. Closer view of area between structures.
18. Free standing HVAC units between the structures.
19. Above prior photo.
20. Above prior photo showing main level window intact to the right.
21. South wall east of the southwest corner showing no windows in the main level, but window openings on the second level.
22. Above prior photo showing window opening close to southwest corner and smoke obscures other windows.
23. Looking north from park area at south wall and smoke/steam.
24. South and east walls.
25. Window in north sector showing wall and doorway inside second level.
26. North double window area showing ceiling, light and smoke detector intact on second level.
27. Second level window farther in middle sector showing partial collapse inside.
28. More collapse in the middle double windows area.
29. Total collapse with only smoke/steam showing in the south double window area
30. Overview of the middle one-third of the affected structure.
31. Third level middle sections windows of the east wall.

32. Close view inside the window showing partially collapsed, but remaining structural members.
33. Bing maps satellite view of affected structure from the south.
34. Bing maps satellite view of the east side.
35. Bing maps satellite view of the north side.

The photos for the following descriptions were taken on 1-2-14 and are marked 2014-001-1 on the photo CD.

1. No photo.
2. Overview of structure from fire department aerial unit.
3. Below prior photo showing the north connection point of the affected structure and next structure.
4. Showing the middle and south sectors of the structure.
5. Closer view of the south sector.
6. Closer view of the middle sector.

The photos for the following descriptions were taken on 1-2-14 with a different camera and are marked 2014-001-2 on the photo CD.

1. The front of the affected structure from the northeast showing it and the connected structure to the north.
2. The south and part of the middle sectors.
3. The middle sector.
4. The north sector.
5. The east and south walls.
6. Closer view of the south wall showing collapse of part of the third level wall and windows on the second level.
7. Overview of the east wall from across the street.
8. Items from the structure on the ground across the street.
9. Right of prior photo showing more items across the street.
10. Different view showing more items across the street.
11. Different view showing items across the street.
12. Different view of photo 8.
13. Number on plywood.
14. Overview of south half of the structure.
15. Looking north at items located across the street.
16. Closer view.
17. Closer view of items.
18. Closer view of items farther north.

The photos for the following descriptions were taken on 1-3-14 and are marked 2014-001-3 on the photo CD.

1. Rock ramp constructed and smaller track hoe is taking the south sector of the east wall down.
2. The east sector of the south wall is also being taken down.
3. Closer view of remaining area of wall.
4. Material on grade level.
5. Looking northwest into structure at remaining second and third level structural materials in the north sector.
6. Left of prior photo showing only interior side of exterior wall and window openings in back (west) wall.
7. Partially collapsed materials in the middle sector of the second level.
8. Interior side of south wall.
9. Overview of back hoe work.
10. Closer view.
11. South wall continuing to be taken down.
12. Victim number one's remains in debris.
13. Closer view.
14. Right side view.
15. Head view.
16. Right side view.
17. Lower torso and legs.
18. Length of body's rear side.
19. Closer view.
20. Buttocks and legs.
21. Legs and feet.
22. Left hand.
23. Right hand embedded in ice.

Photos #1 through #4 for the following descriptions was taken on 1-2-14 with a different camera, but was not downloaded on the computer and are marked 2014-001-4. Photos #5 through #23 were taken on 1-3-14 and are marked 2014-001-4 also.

1. Electric space heater's interior workings, along with a second space heater on right edge of photo.
2. Second space heater.
3. Electric plug.
4. Closer view of workings from photo 1.
5. Victim number two's remains in debris in the basement area of south sector.
6. Closer view.
7. Different view.

8. Part of an appendage.
9. Head and upper back.
10. Beneath prior photo.
11. Head area.
12. Body area.
13. Unburned wall studs in basement level on south wall.
14. Looking into main level rear store area doorway to cooler.
15. Right of prior photo showing interior door and side of stairway not burned.
16. Plastic bottle containers stacked and unburned.
17. Overview.
18. North sector second and third levels not burned.
19. West middle sector west area smoke damaged only on second level.
20. Looking down into basement level of south sector after victim removal.
21. Left of prior photo.
22. Unburned collapsed materials in floor area of middle sector.
23. Above prior photo showing smoke stained walls in west area of middle sector.

End of Photo Inventory

Case Number:
2014 - 001 - 1

State Fire Marshal Division
Department of Public Safety
444 Cedar Street, Suite 145
St. Paul, MN 55101-5145



Supplemental Report

Confidentiality: Juvenile: ☐ Homicide: ☐ Confidential: ☐

Property

Name: Cedar Avenue Apartments
Address: 512 Cedar Avenue South
City: Minneapolis County: Hennepin State: MN Zip: 55454-

Owner

Last First Middle
Garad Nor DBA Wadani Properties LLC

Incident Detail

Fire Date: 01/01/2014 Fire Time: 0800

Prosecution: County Attorney Referral: ☐ Yes ☒ No Declined by CO: ☐ Arrest: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Conviction: ☐ Yes ☐ No Civil Disposition: ☐
Sentence:

Disposition

☒ Open ☐ Closed ☐ Referred to other agency Referral Info:

Investigation Report

On February 27, 2014, Minneapolis Police Arson Squad Detective Sergeant Sean McKenna and I traveled to the Hennepin County Medical Center Burn Unit and briefly interviewed **MUQTAR SAID**, who was the listed occupant of apartment #2 in the affected apartment building. Said was able to briefly answer questions and stated the following:

- He was in his apartment and it blew up.
- He had gone to the bathroom earlier and was back in his bed when it blew up.
- He confirmed it was cold in the apartment that morning and he had an electric space heater running.
- He at first stated he didn't have a natural gas heater, but shortly after stated it didn't work.
- He doesn't cook in the apartment and his friend didn't use the stove either.
- He looked at a photo of two electric space heaters and stated his was like "the second one".
- When he was shown a photo of the older natural gas heater rear side, he stated he did not have one like that in his apartment.
- He was in his bed when the explosion happened.
- One friend, Muhammad, was staying with him. He doesn't remember Muhammad's other name.

- He and Muhammad made it outside by the stairs.
- He had lived at the apartment since last February.

The interview ended at this point.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Rahman', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ronald C. Rahman

Deputy State Fire Marshal – Investigator

Date Submitted: 2-27-14

Case Number:
2014 - 001 - 2

State Fire Marshal Division
Department of Public Safety
444 Cedar Street, Suite 145
St. Paul, MN 55101-5145



Supplemental Report

Confidentiality: Juvenile: ☐ Homicide: ☐ Confidential: ☐

Property

Name: Cedar Avenue Apartments
Address: 512 Cedar Avenue South
City: Minneapolis County: Hennepin State: MN Zip: 55454-

Owner

Last First Middle
Garad Nor DBA Wadani Properties LLC

Incident Detail

Fire Date: 01/01/2014 Fire Time: 0800

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Conviction: ☐ Yes ☐ No Civil Disposition: ☐
Sentence:

Disposition

☐ Open ☒ Closed ☐ Referred to other agency Referral Info:

Investigation Report

The following is the final report relative to this case, based on information known, discovered or generated thus far. The area of explosion/fire appears to be on the second level of the structure in the area of apartment #2. The cause of the explosion/fire remains undetermined and appears to be undeterminable at this time. The reasoning for this is included below.

The incident involving this property appears to have begun on the second level and, further, it appears to have begun in apartment #2 on the second level. Apartment #2 is along the south wall and is the first apartment west of apartment #1, which is in the southeast corner. This is based on video recorded by the Minnesota State Trooper who traveled to the scene from the south on Cedar Avenue and the trooper's video recorder was operating during this time.

The video shows flames coming out from the eastern-most window of the south wall on the second level. This window serviced apartment #2. Flames can be seen coming from that window prior to the trooper traveling under an overpass for interstate 94 and the flames continue consistently. As the trooper comes closer to the scene, the flames appear to be traveling up to and almost past the third level of the structure on the south wall. No flames are showing from the windows of the east wall (apartment #1) until just before the trooper parks on

the east side of Cedar Avenue in the same block as the affected property. No other south wall windows on the second or third levels exhibit fire from them as the trooper's camera approaches the scene.

Also in the trooper's recording, structural items, including windows and window frames, are noted on the asphalt of Cedar Avenue, with the heavier pieces being located in the southbound lane of the avenue. Lighter materials are noted in the northbound lane closest to the center stripe of the avenue. The materials were thrown to these locations from the force of the explosion inside apartment #2, which also destroyed the interior walls of that apartment. It was subsequently determined by the same video that Minneapolis Fire Department personnel moved many of these items to the east curb and grass area beyond the curb to clear a path for fire department vehicles to gain access. Without this information initially being known, the force of the explosion appeared to be much larger to push those items beyond the entire width of the avenue.

The MTC bus video (driving on its route south on Cedar Avenue) shows smoke coming up from the affected building and this smoke is initially light grey in color. The amount of smoke grew very fast; the color also went to an almost black color very quickly; and the smoke amount continued to grow. It also shows the Minneapolis Police squad parked crossways on Cedar Avenue in an attempt to block the street after the initial incident. It should also be noted that on the MTC bus video and the state trooper's video, the other vehicles can be seen in each and this assisted in coordinating the events that each depicted with the events depicted from the opposite view.

Visual examination of the affected structure from the exterior on the date of loss revealed that the north one-third remained relatively intact on all levels. The structure exhibited partial collapse in the middle one-third and what appeared to be total collapse in the south one-third of the structure. These observations were all made from the east wall windows (Cedar Avenue side). Fires continued to burn in the collapsed structural and contents debris in the south and middle thirds of the structure on this date and through the night.

Visual examination was assisted on January 2 with the use of a fire department aerial ladder apparatus and visual observations were made from above the structure. This confirmed that the south one-third was in fact collapsed in what appeared to be the basement level. This also confirmed the partial collapse of the middle one-third of the structure. This date and January 3 were utilized to locate, expose and extricate potential victims that were not able to be located thus far. The south wall windows were verified as one each for apartment #2, the bathroom (next room to the west) and also the room marked on the property owner's sketch as "office" in the southwest corner in my photos 2014-001-1, photos 4 and 5.

On January 2 and 3, 2014, visual observations were able to be made into the grocery store on the main level. It did not appear to have suffered any fire damage, although smoke damage, along with water damage, was somewhat apparent. Cardboard boxes of various products were noted on the shelves and those boxes could still be recognized and read.

During the course of victim locating with the use of the track hoe, electric space heaters were noted in debris and set aside. Also noted were two free-standing natural gas-fired heaters that appeared to be older units. The secondary regulator and copper natural gas tubing was also noted for one of the units.

The Minneapolis Police Officer who wrote a theft report on the third level of the structure and returned to his squad parked in front of the structure moments prior to the incident stated to others that he smelled gas similar to that of a stove top pilot light leaking gas without a flame burning.

Property owner **GARAD NOR** was interviewed by Minneapolis Police Detective Sergeant Sean McKenna and me on or about January 14, 2014 with his attorney, Bill LeMire, present. Nor stated:

- This is his only rental property.
- All apartments on the second and third levels are studio style, with an approximate maximum of 220 square feet each.
- The occupants of each level's apartments share two bathrooms on the same level. (Nor also provided a rough sketch of the apartments' locations for the second and third levels and the bathrooms on each level.
- We also learned the structure was heated with electric baseboard heaters, but some of the units did have older gas-fired heaters in them. Nor did not know which units had the heaters.

On a subsequent date, Nor contacted me via telephone and stated that apartment #2 was smaller in size, between 100 and 150 square feet. It also did not have a kitchen range in it, as did other apartments.

Occupant/witness **ABDI ALI QOBEY**, who resided in apartment #5, was interviewed by McKenna and me on or about January 20, 2014. Apartment #5 was directly north of apartment #1 and was in the middle of the structure, north and south. Qobey stated:

- He was awake and was lying on his bed at the time of the incident.
- He was tossed about from the force.
- He went to his door, opened it and saw fire in the common area. The interior walls for apartments #1 and #2 were destroyed.
- He saw two individuals he believed were the occupants of apartments #1 and #2. One of the occupants was on fire and the other was not.
- He then went back into his apartment and exited through a window onto the sidewalk below.
- He did not smell (the odorant of) natural gas.
- He knows that apartment #1 had a kitchen range, as he used to rent that apartment. He did not know if apartment #2 had a kitchen range.

Apartment #1 occupant, **ADANI ALI**, was interviewed via telephone by McKenna on or about February 3, 2014. Ali stated that:

- He was asleep when the explosion happened and it lifted his bed/mattress.
- He saw a bright light.
- He went to the door and saw fire everywhere, including the bathroom.
- He put his coat over his upper body and head, and then ran through flames to and down the stairway to the outside.
- He did not smell an odor of natural gas.

Other occupants were interviewed in the presence of their attorneys.

On or about February 27, 2014, **MUQTAR SAID**, the occupant of apartment #2, was interviewed by McKenna and me at the Hennepin County Medical Center Burn Unit, where he continues to be a patient. It was previously learned that Said was burned over approximately 80% of his body from the incident. Said was not

able to be interviewed prior to this date as he was intubated and only within the past two weeks had the tube removed. Because of this, he was now able to speak. During the course of the interview, Said stated that:

- He was in bed in his apartment when the explosion happened.
- He had gotten up previously and went to the bathroom (next door).
- It was cold that morning and he did have an electric space heater running in the apartment.
- He also had an overnight guest, Muhammad (the only name he knew), who was also in the apartment.
- He first stated that his apartment did not have a gas-fired heater, but then stated it did not work.
- He also did not cook in the apartment.
- He and Muhammad made it down the stairs after the explosion.

In review with Mark Bishop, a private fire investigator with Prairieland Fire and Forensics, who was retained by CenterPoint Energy, on the date of the incident gas company officials tested the odorant in the natural gas and found it to have an appropriate amount. Testing of the soil outside the structure in the area of the natural gas supply piping failed to reveal any fugitive gas in the soil.

The hypotheses that cannot be discarded include:

- Natural gas leaking from an unknown point inside the structure past meter location and building to lower explosive limit with air at or near an ignition source inside apartment #2 or that area;
- An attempt by the night guest in apartment #2 (Muhammad) attempting to operate the older free-standing natural gas fired heater without success;
- Occupant Said used the bathroom a short time prior to the incident. The weather had been very cold prior to this incident and it is not known if the sanitary sewer piping at or below the "U" shaped trap may have cracked and allowed methane gas into the structure.

Due to the three hypotheses listed, the cause of this incident must be classified as "Undeterminable". This case may also be marked in the closed disposition.

Respectfully submitted,



Ronald C. Rahman

Deputy State Fire Marshal – Investigator

Date Submitted: 2-28-14