



NEWS RELEASE

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(Three-Alarm Fire Heavily Damages Birch Pointe Apartment Building)

An early morning three-alarm fire displaced as many as 40 Beaverton residents from the Birch Pointe Apartments, 17700 NW Cornell Road. The call came in to the Washington County 9-1-1 Dispatch Center at 1:24 am. Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue Lieutenant Ronnie Mason and his crew from Station 64 were aboard the first-arriving fire engine. “The minute we rolled out of the station at 185th and Sunset Highway, we could see the fire.” The crew called for a second alarm before arriving on scene.

Faced with the magnitude of fire and fearing that residents may be trapped or still sleeping, firefighters immediately focused on rescue operations. Mason added, “Thankfully, Hillsboro and Beaverton Police officers were among the first to arrive and had gone door-to-door in the 18-unit, three-story building awakening residents and alerting them to the fire.” Other tenants were awakened by their smoke alarm. All residents successfully evacuated the building and none were injured in the blaze. A family dog did perish as a result of smoke inhalation.

Firefighters from Hillsboro, Portland and Cornelius joined TVF&R in battling the blaze. They brought the blaze under control after approximately 40 minutes. An estimated 80 firefighters from the four organizations joined in the fight. Crews remained on scene for several hours extinguishing hot spots. Law enforcement officers also provided valuable traffic control along Cornell Road as the growing number of engine companies arrived. Tri-Met provided two buses where displaced residents could escape the chilly overnight temperatures.

Five apartments sustained heavy fire damage, and the remaining thirteen in the building were impacted by smoke and water. A fortified firewall common in apartment construction helped firefighters limit the spread of the flames. “Without the firewall, our firefighters would have been battling flames in the attic the entire length of the building,” stated Incident Commander Norvin Collins.

The building’s construction predates the current requirement to install sprinklers in multi-family facilities of this size. Had there been sprinklers, fire investigators say the fire damage would have been far more limited.

Several hours after the fire had been controlled firefighters escorted residents through all but the most heavily damaged units to claim valuables, clothing, and medications. The American Red Cross sent a disaster assistance team to the scene where they assisted displaced residents in the process of finding alternate shelter. They have established a service center to provide assistance at the Oak Hills Christian Church, 2800 NW 153rd Avenue, Beaverton.

Fire investigators remain on the scene and are interviewing residents and witnesses, as well as examining evidence, in an effort to determine the cause and origin of the fire.