



# Tualatin couple hope fire is a lesson to others

**Misfortune - Sprinklers might have saved their vintage 1901 farmhouse**

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TUALATIN -- Kim Williams and her husband, Michael Blackmon, were excited about going to San Francisco early the morning of April 4. They locked up their home on Southwest Robbins Road and set out at 5:45 a.m. for Portland International Airport.

Then, just as they were handing their tickets to the gate attendant, they were stopped by two Port of Portland police officers with urgent news: Your 1901 vintage farmhouse is on fire.

Before they could even get home, they got calls from friends and relatives from all over the country who saw live news helicopter video feeds of the fire on CNN.

"We rushed right home, but it already was too late," Williams says. "We lost everything."

But Williams and Blackmon, who are living temporarily in an RV, say it won't be a total loss if others can learn from their misfortune.

"When we rebuild the place, we're going to put in a sprinkler system," Blackmon says. "After this, I will never be without a sprinkler system."

The most galling thing was they were putting the finishing touches on a thorough remodel. For the past several years, they had endured discomfort-by-rotation as they tore out a stairway and went from room to room, removing layers of old carpentry, remodeling and decor until they got down to the studs. They were one countertop away from finishing the entire project.

"I could kick myself," Blackmon says. "I had bare walls. That's the time to put in a sprinkler system."

Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue investigators determined the fire was not intentionally set but were unable to name a specific cause.

Eric McMullen, deputy fire marshal for Tualatin Valley, says the cost of a sprinkler system installed during new construction or a down-to-the-bones remodel is about \$1.50 per square foot.

"It's about the same as wall-to-wall carpeting," McMullen says. "Today's residential systems are selective -- they only sprinkle the areas where they are needed. They also look a lot better than the old-fashioned ones you see in businesses."

And for people like Williams and Blackmon, who live in an area without fire hydrants, they have the option of hooking up the sprinkler system to a swimming pool.

In 1986, the city of Scottsdale, Ariz., began requiring all new buildings, including single-family homes, to be equipped with sprinkler systems. In the first 15 years, there were 49 fires in sprinkler-equipped homes without a death, while 13 people died in homes without sprinklers.

Meanwhile, a national study in 1998 through 2001 showed that sprinklers reduced fire-damage costs by 95 percent.

For Williams and Blackmon, sprinklers might have helped them avoid pain.

"We lost almost all of our photos, all of the souvenirs we picked up while traveling," Williams says. "And how do you replace a drawing your son did for you? If I think about it, I'll start crying."