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Girl, 5, dies in Englewood house fire

By Ilana Arougheti
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An official investigates an apartment building in the 500 block of West Marquette Road in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood where a 5-year-old girl died during a fire on Dec. 26, 2023. (Eileen T. Meslar/Chicago Tribune)

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A 5-year-old girl was killed in a house fire in Englewood early Tuesday morning, according to police and fire officials.

Firefighters and police responded to a multifamily home in the 500 block of West Marquette Road around 7:15 a.m. A passing ambulance saw smoke coming from the window of a second-floor apartment, Deputy Commissioner Marc Ferman of the Chicago Fire Department told reporters Tuesday morning.

When firefighters arrived minutes later, they got word that a child was still inside the burning apartment, Ferman said. The 5-year-old girl was dead by the time firefighters reached her.

“These guys got in quick. They extinguished this fire pretty quick,” Ferman said. “... They knew where to look, but unfortunately the child was deceased when they found her.”

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The two-floor, four-unit brick building is across the street from Benjamin E. Mays Elementary Academy and Zacks Food Mart, both shuttered for the holiday week.

The child shared the apartment with her parents and two siblings — an infant and a 6-year-old. Both siblings survived the fire uninjured, Ferman said.

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The girl's father was injured while trying to get into the apartment, Fire Department spokesperson Larry Langford said. He had been trying to rescue his family members from the fire, Ferman said.

The man was transported to the University of Chicago Medical Center with non-life-threatening burns, Langford said.

Ferman became emotional as he described the fire to reporters Tuesday morning.

"It's always tough, with children especially," Ferman said. "It's rough on the family, of course, and even the guys that responded. Just looking in their eyes, coming out knowing that they couldn't get there in time."

As firefighters battled the blaze Tuesday morning, several windows were blown out. Firefighters stepped around a burned laundry hamper and the splinters of a coffee table on their way in and out of the building.

The preliminary cause of the fire is careless use of smoking materials, Langford said.

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Firefighters are looking into the possibility that someone in the house was playing with

matches or a lighter, Ferman said.

“We just want to reinforce and monitor children with playing with matches,” Ferman said.

The building remained blocked off midmorning as fire and police personnel sifted through rubble on the second floor. Flames charred the roof of the building Tuesday morning, coating cars below with ashy debris.

The family whose apartment burned will be displaced due to the level of damage, Ferman said. The unit directly below may also have been damaged.

Tuesday morning, residents of other units in the building gathered in a nearby lot, some in their cars and some still in pajamas. They declined to comment. Several families shared a large box of White Castle sliders with emergency personnel as they waited for updates.

Check back for updates.

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