

Alton Fire and Police Departments investigating recent fires as "suspicious"

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Two fires have ravaged vacant buildings over the course of this last week in Alton.

Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold said the first fire occurred on the evening of Thursday, Dec. 28 at an unoccupied building on Ninth Street. The two-story structure was fully involved by the time crews arrived on the scene, and the fire was extinguished before it could reach an occupied home as close as eight feet from the scene. While firefighters

were able to save the neighboring structure, the original structure was completely destroyed by flames.

"There is not enough left of that structure, and what is left is unstable," Sebold said. "We are not able to gather evidence about that fire's start."

A second fire occurred Monday, Jan. 1 at another unoccupied structure. This one was at 1260 State Street. That fire occurred in the basement, and Sebold said firefighters were able to extinguish it within a half hour of their arrival on the scene.

Unlike the first (much larger) blaze, the smaller fire on State Street was isolated to the structure's basement. Sebold said firefighters could determine where the fire started, but was unable to locate any accelerant used to start the fire.

Because of each fire taking place within otherwise unoccupied buildings, Sebold said the fires are "suspicious." Neither structure had utilities, and both were bank-owned, but owned by different banks.

Outside of arson, Sebold said the fires may have been started by someone attempting to seek warmth during this coldest part of the year. Due to a lack of utilities, such people may take to starting fires within the structure in an effort to keep warm. No bodies or injuries were discovered by firefighters with either incident, but a window near the kitchen of the State Street structure was broken, and the door was closed, but not locked.

"The problem with fires in any abandoned structure is no one was home, nor did anyone report seeing anyone leaving the scene, so there is no real information to go on," Sebold said. "Unless information comes from someone in the neighborhood, there is no information on a suspect."

Alton Police Chief Jason Simmons confirmed his officers were in fact investigating the scene, but could not confirm either case was in fact arson at this time.