

Family without a home after terrible fire, Highland Pierron, other agencies, save neighborhood homes

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HIGHLAND - A Highland family with a 1-year-old child is unfortunately without a home or belongings today after a terrible fire in the 1200 block of Lynn Street. A heroic effort by the Highland Pierron Department and other nearby agencies prevented the monstrous blaze from spreading to neighboring houses.

The home is owned by William and Ashley Eck. Highland Fire Chief Brian Wilson said the home is valued at approximately \$105,000 and has been deemed a total loss. Furnishings and personal items valued at an estimated \$25,000 – \$30,000. The investigation by the Office of the State Fire Marshal has not yet identified a cause of the fire, although there is no reason to believe that it was anything other than an accidental fire.

The Highland Fire Department responded to a reported structure fire at 4:10 a.m. Wednesday morning at this location. First-arriving police officers were quickly able to determine that all occupants had safely escaped from the home.

"Those occupants were taken to an ambulance to keep them warm and were eventually transported to the hospital simply as a precaution," Chief Wilson said. "Neighbors in homes on either side of the fire building were evacuated from their homes for their own safety.

"Arriving fire units found heavy fire showing from a carport on the north side of the home. The fire was being fed by northwest winds of about 15 mph, pushing the flames into the house. Siding on the house to the north was melting and the house was off-gassing, which occurs just before it bursts into flame also.

"A hose line was placed into operation immediately on the exposed home, preventing it from also catching fire. Efforts were then made on the home downwind and to the south of the fire to also protect it from catching fire. Additional hose lines were put into operation on the fire building to extinguish the flames there. Firefighters attempted to enter the fire building but were prevented from entering by conditions they encountered."

William Eck said as he left the home for work, he observed a glow in the small storage area of the carport. When he opened the door, the interior was on fire. He first attempted to hook up his garden hose to fight the fire but that hose proved to be frozen and unusable. He then helped his wife and child escape from the home, then moved his family cars from the driveway prior to the arrival of the fire department.

Chief Wilson said extremely cold temperatures caused hoses and firefighters air masks to freeze up and become inoperable very quickly.

"Freezing water caused slip hazards and made navigating on the fire ground very difficult," he added. "The spread of the fire was stopped within an hour but the deep-seated fire took another couple of hours to completely extinguish."

The Highland Pierron Fire Department responds automatically with Highland to all building fires.

In addition, due to extreme weather conditions, a MABAS Box Alarm was requested, bringing assistance at the scene from the Marine Community Fire Protection District, the St. Rose Fire Protection District, and the St. Jacob Fire Protection District and an ambulance from the Troy Fire Protection District covered the Highland station for subsequent calls. Madison County Emergency Management Agency sent a rehabilitation

unit to help firefighters with periodic rewarming. The MABAS Air truck also responded to help fill the breathing air bottles used by firefighters.

Chief Wilson agreed without the quick response of the Highland Pierron Fire Department and others in the MABAS Box Alarm system, the outcome of this fire could have been even worse for neighbors.

"All of these firefighters worked in bitterly cold conditions and most had layers of ice on their clothing and gloves," Chief Wilson said. "Frequent rewarming was necessary to prevent frostbite injuries. Their outstanding and relentless efforts were responsible for keeping the fire from spreading to neighboring homes, even when fed by the stiff winds."





