U.S. Fire Administration/Technical Report Series

# Eight Children and Two Adults Die in Rural House Fire

## Remer, Minnesota

*USFA-TR-028/January 1989*




FEMA

# U.S. Fire Administration Fire Investigations Program

The U.S. Fire Administration develops reports on selected major fires throughout the country. The fires usually involve multiple deaths or a large loss of property. But the primary criterion for deciding to do a report is whether it will result in significant "lessons learned." In some cases these lessons bring to light new knowledge about fire--the effect of building construction or contents, human behavior in fire, etc. In other cases, the lessons are not new but are serious enough to highlight once again, with yet another fire tragedy report. In some cases, special reports are developed to discuss events, drills, or new technologies which are of interest to the fire service.

The reports are sent to fire magazines and are distributed at National and Regional fire meetings. The International Association of Fire Chiefs assists the USFA in disseminating the findings throughout the fire service. On a continuing basis the reports are available on request from the USFA; announcements of their availability are published widely in fire journals and newsletters.

This body of work provides detailed information on the nature of the fire problem for policymakers who must decide on allocations of resources between fire and other pressing problems, and within the fire service to improve codes and code enforcement, training, public fire education, building technology, and other related areas.

The Fire Administration, which has no regulatory authority, sends an experienced fire investigator into a community after a major incident only after having conferred with the local fire authorities to insure that the assistance and presence of the USFA would be supportive and would in no way interfere with any review of the incident they are themselves conducting. The intent is not to arrive during the event or even immediately after, but rather after the dust settles, so that a complete and objective review of all the important aspects of the incident can be made. Local authorities review the USFA's report while it is in draft. The USFA investigator or team is available to local authorities should they wish to request technical assistance for their own investigation.

This report and its recommendations were developed by USFA staff and by TriData Corporation, Arlington, Virginia, its staff and consultants, who are under contract to assist the USFA in carrying out the Fire Reports Program.

The USFA appreciates the cooperation received from the State Fire Marshal of Minnesota Tom Brace and the following members of his staff: Chief Investigator David E. Knefelkamp, Supervisor-Deputy State Fire Marshal Elmer H. Baltes, Deputy State Fire Marshal-Investigator David L. Bahma, and Deputy State Fire Marshal-Investigator Ronald C. Rahman.

For additional copies of this report write to the U.S. Fire Administration, 16825 South Seton Avenue, Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727. The report is available on the Administration's Web site at http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/

# Eight Children and Two Adults Die in Rural House Fire Remer, Minnesota

Investigated by: Daniel J. Carpenter, Jr.

This is Report 028 of the Major Fires Investigation Project conducted by TriData Corporation under contract EMW-88-C-2649 to the United States Fire Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Revised: March 2011




FEMA

Department of Homeland Security
United States Fire Administration
National Fire Data Center

# U.S. Fire Administration

## Mission Statement

*As an entity of the Department of Homeland Security, the mission of the USFA is to reduce life and economic losses due to fire and related emergencies, through leadership, advocacy, coordination, and support. We serve the Nation independently, in coordination with other Federal agencies, and in partnership with fire protection and emergency service communities. With a commitment to excellence, we provide public education, training, technology, and data initiatives.*

FEMA

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# Eight Children and Two Adults Die in Rural House Fire Remer, Minnesota


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## OVERVIEW

Only two hours into the new year, 1989, the small rural town of Remer, Minnesota, located approximately 85 miles west of Duluth, Minnesota, experienced the most devastating single-family house fire in the State's history.

Ten people perished, apparently as they slept, when a fire rapidly spread through an old two-story schoolhouse that had been moved onto the site and converted for use as a residential occupancy. Eight children from three families and the parents of two of the children died in the fire. The surviving parents of four of the children had left the house at about 2300 hours that evening, New Year's Eve, to celebrate a birthday at a local pub. They came home at about 0230 to discover the house ablaze and firefighters on the scene.

Specific cause of the fire was undetermined. Strong consideration was given to faulty electrical, overfused circuits and human factors after extensive investigation and statements made by the victims prior to the fire and in statements written in a journal by Kimberly Smischney, one of the children killed in the fire.

There were no smoke detectors present in the home when the fire occurred.

# SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

| Issues | Comments |
|---|---|
| Detection | The fire was discovered early New Year's morning by a passerby. Much of the home had already been destroyed by the time the fire department had arrived. |
| Casualties | Ten dead, two adults and eight children. All fatalities had high carbon monoxide levels and were believed to be sleeping at the time of death. |
| Smoke Detectors | None present. Early detection devices presumably would have saved at least some of the occupants. |
| Structure | Two-story wood-frame structure dating form the 1920's; was originally a schoolhouse. Heat was provided by a wood-fired furnace.<br>Housekeeping and upkeep were reportedly very poor; structure contained a heavy combustible load. Insurance had been refused on the property. |

## BACKGROUND

This was the largest loss of life due to a fire in a single-family dwelling in Minnesota's history since records have been kept.

Remer, Minnesota, is a small rural community with a population of 396. The surrounding area is primarily a farming community of low and middle income families. Fire protection is provided by the Remer Volunteer Fire Department. The apparatus operated by the fire department included two 750 GPM engines, a 1,500 gallon tanker, a 4 by 4 rescue unit, and a breathing apparatus unit equipped with a compressor.

Department training is conducted monthly. Additional training activities are provided by the Minnesota Vocational Technical System which conducts live and simulated fires on buildings and provides portable training equipment and a trailer for training firefighters in a smoke filled atmosphere on the proper use of self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).

## THE STRUCTURE (HOUSE)

The structure was a two-story wood-frame country schoolhouse, which was purchased by the present owner in the early 1940's. The building was moved to a rural area approximately 2.3 miles from the town of Remer and converted to a residential occupancy. It was situated about one tenth of a mile off State Highway #6. The schoolhouse is believed to have been built in the 1920s.

The main floor consisted of one bedroom, a kitchen/dining area, a bathroom, and a living room, with an attached woodshed at the rear. There were four bedrooms, a library, and a bathroom on the upper floor. Interior finish was reported to be wood paneling and pressed wallboard. The dimensions of the structure were reported as 32 foot by 21 foot with an attached small woodshed and an 11 foot by 33 foot attached workshop.

John and Nancy Watson and their four children had recently moved into the wood-frame home for the winter months while the owner (Nancy Watson's and Rebecca Smischney's father) went south. John and Nancy lived the rest of the year in a mobile home located on the property. The mobile home was equipped with a hard-wired smoke detector and one battery operated smoke detector; however, the frame home they moved into for the winter had no smoke detectors installed. The owner of the home was an inventing engineer by trade. He reportedly never threw anything away

and the basement was quite full of things he had collected and saved for years. He also had a large collection of books in the house that he had acquired over the years. This resulted in an extraordinary fireload and generated conditions that resulted in rapid fire spread.

State Fire Marshal investigators reported an insurance agent from Remer went to the home about four months prior to the fire to consider insuring it for a mortgage application on the property. The insurance agent told investigators, "There was absolutely no reason for anyone to live like that." He also stated that he told the owners that if there were ever a fire the place would be gone. The general appearance and lack of upkeep turned him away without even considering writing the insurance requested. There had been no insurance for the past four years and no value was ever considered.

## THE FIRE

The temperature in the early hours of the new year was about zero with no detectable wind and a light dusting of fresh snow.

Rebecca and Jean Smischney (sister and brother-in-law to Nancy and John Watson) and the two Smischney children of Bemidji, Minnesota, had arrived at the Watson home Saturday, December 31, to celebrate the new year, as well as Nancy Watson's birthday. John and Nancy left the house at around 2300 hours that evening to go into town to have a drink and get some cigarettes. Mrs. Watson's brother-in-law, Jean Smischney said he would watch the kids while the Watson's were in town. Nancy and John went to the local pub and stayed there until after the New Year's fanfare before returning home.

Reports after the fire indicated that the victims may have spent much of the night watching videotape movies before they went to bed. John and Nancy reported that the kids and Rebecca were in bed before they left the house that evening.

The fire was reported at 0209 on New Year's Day via a 9-1-1 call to the sheriff's office who dispatched the Remer Fire Department. The 9-1-1 call was made by a neighbor of the Watson's who had been alerted by a passing motorist that the house across the road was on fire. Further observation by the neighbors indicated that the fire was burning throughout the entire structure and had burned through the roof.

A Cass County Sheriff's Deputy monitoring the call while en route and approximately one mile from the incident confirmed that flames were visible in the area. Upon arrival the deputy noted the structure was totally engulfed. He encountered a neighbor running across the field toward the fire who stated the people that lived in the house were not at home; however, he was certain there were children in the residence. The deputy immediately ran around the entire perimeter of the structure and found no evidence or tracks in the fresh snow or signs of anyone having escaped the structure. He estimated the fire department arrived approximately 5 to 7 minutes after his arrival on the scene.

The first arriving firefighters immediately laid two hoselines and began attacking the fire. The fire was knocked down in approximately 15 minutes, but most of the structure had been consumed prior to the arrival of the fire department.

Ten members of the Remer Fire Department responded to the fire, with a 750 GPM engine and a 1,500 gallon tanker, using a 2,000 gallon drop tank. Water was shuttled to the scene from the town of Remer. The fire was extinguished using approximately 10,000 gallons of water. The winds were calm with sub zero temperatures throughout the night. The only remaining portion of the structure

after extinguishment was a small portion of the north end, including the workshop and the woodshed. The first and second story of the structure had collapsed into the basement except again for a small portion of the north end located adjacent to the workshop.

Remer Fire Chief Leo Renn indicated that the fire spread very quickly and that it was unlikely that without early warning anyone would have awaken before overcome by smoke. Several of the victims were found on couches or beds on which they had been sleeping.

John and Nancy Watson returned to the house to find it ablaze. Inside were their four children; Nancy Watson's visiting sister Rebecca and brother-in-law Jean Smischney and their two children; also present in the home were two neighbor children who were spending the night. All ten occupants perished in the fire.

## THE VICTIMS

The grim work of recovering the bodies began at daybreak after the arrival of Deputy State Fire Marshal/Investigator Dave Bahma. A city backhoe was brought in from town to assist in debris removal for recovering the bodies and investigation purposes. Only the attached workshop and woodshed at the north end of the structure and a small attached section of upstairs flooring remained standing. Five bodies were found upstairs, and five bodies were found in the basement because the upper floors in which they were sleeping had collapsed during the fire. There was no indication any of the victims had awakened or tried to escape. Autopsies revealed that all the victims died from smoke inhalation. Dental records were used to positively identify the victims.

## FIRE CAUSE

The specific cause of the fire was undetermined. Several probable causes related both to building features and human behavior were investigated.

### Causes Eliminated

The old fuel oil space heater was ruled out as it had not been used for years. The control was in the off position and there was no external fuel supply connected to the unit.

The homemade wood furnace was ruled out as a possible cause after careful examination of the unit and its components. However, it was noted the furnace duct system was homemade using 2-inch planking with tin tacked onto it. (It should be noted it is not acceptable practice to utilize wood or framing members to distribute heat in a hot air system under any circumstance. This was one more inherent danger existing in the house prior to the fire.)

A cooking-related fire was ruled out after examination of the stove and oven controls which indicated they were in the off position.

### Possible Fire Cause – Structural

Electrical Distribution System – The fuse panel was examined and found to contain 20 and 30 amp fuses installed in circuits designed to be fused with 15 amp fuses. This coupled with information from several sources gives a strong indication this may have been the cause of the fire. John Watson stated that on several occasions a light switch located in the basement at the south end of the house had not been working properly. He would have to flick it several times in order for the light to go on. In addition, information Jean Smischney relayed to his brothers indicated there were recurrent

problems with the electrical system and lights going out in the residence. Mr. Smischney's brother further stated that Jean had also told him the house was a fire trap. Kimberly Smischney also kept a journal at school that consisted of two pages in which she made mention of unusual electrical occurrences at the Watson house in Remer. In addition, Kimberly's teacher remembered the young child telling her that the lights would go out when the children ran across the floor.

### Possible Fire Cause – Human Factors

The family Christmas tree was a live tree that was put up on December 10. Upon investigation the only remaining recognizable indication of the tree was the Christmas tree stand. The stand was a homemade device that consisted of metal cross members with metal stabilizing brackets. It did not hold water. John Watson stated there were two sets of lights on the tree, and Nancy Watson stated the lights were on when they left the house that evening. The lights consisted of one string of the newer style small lights and one string of large lights that were an older type. The Christmas tree was located in an area of total burn out.

John Watson and Jean Smischney were both smokers. The night John and Nancy left for town, John stated that all the children and Rebecca were in bed and that Jean was on the couch watching television and said he would watch the kids while the Watsons went to town. It is not certain if Jean later went to bed or fell asleep on the couch. In either case another potential fire cause may have been related to smoking.

John Watson told State Fire Marshal investigators that it may have been caused by cigarette ashes as their standard practice was to dump the ashes into a paper bag in the kitchen which Jean may have done before going to bed.

The possibility the fire was deliberately set or was caused by children playing with fire was eliminated for the following reasons:

- There was no insurance on the home nor members of the family except Rebecca and Jean carried 25,000 dollar life insurance that was added to their estate and just covered funeral costs. Therefore, there was no financial gain incentive.
- The children were in bed and sleeping before the Watsons left that evening.
- There were no known enemies of any of the families. The Watsons got along well with neighbors and the children were liked in school. The Smischneys and Watsons got along well.
- The Watsons stated there had been no threats against them.
- There were no traces of accelerant or incendiary devices found.
- There were no footprints or tracks in the fresh snow other than those belonging to the Watsons as determined by the Sheriff's deputy assigned to the case.

The fire is considered accidental in nature with strong consideration given to the electrical system in the house and/or careless handling of smoking materials or other human factors.

## THE AFTERMATH

Remer residents said the deaths are especially tragic because the town is small with only about 400 residents.

Nancy Watson was a lifelong resident of Remer and had grown up in the house. It was reported that the Watsons were a very close-knit family.

Members of the Remer Fire Department were also extremely shaken as a result of this tragic fire in their community.

More than 1,000 people filed into the local high school gym to mourn the deaths. In order to help deal with the tragedy, school officials decided to bring in two psychologists. The elementary school opened an hour late after the holiday break so teachers and staff could meet with counselors before the students arrived. The counselors were available throughout the day to meet with classes or individual students.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**1. Fire Safety Education and Awareness**

This fire was a classic example of the need for the public to be aware of fire safety issues in their everyday lives. Parents need to be motivated to action in order to protect their families. It was indicated that Fire Prevention Week was observed in the Remer schools in October. The school conducted fire drills and encouraged students to practice at home. However, there were no lesson plans available for the students to take home. In addition, the fire department brought an engine to the school to familiarize the children with the equipment and firefighters in gear.

**2. Family Escape Planning and Smoke Detectors**

It was stated the mobile home the Watsons lived in prior to moving into the converted schoolhouse was equipped with smoke detectors. This would indicate some awareness of fire safety. However, there were no smoke detectors present in their current residence prior to the fire.

The significance of smoke detectors in dwellings occupied by families and where families may visit needs to be stressed. Fire safety is not only a home issue but should be a consideration wherever the family may be. It is therefore imperative that parents ask the question "Are there smoke detectors present in all environments where my children may be sleeping." This would include their own homes, relatives' homes, and any time they may be away, such as with school activities, at camp, while babysitting, etc.

Along with installation and maintenance of smoke detectors comes the need to have a well-developed and practiced escape plan that would include information on sleeping with bedroom doors closed, planning two ways out of every sleeping room, establishing a meeting, place, and calling the fire department.

**3. Smoking and Smoking Material Safety**

It is apparent that even though specific cause was not determined in this tragic fire the safety practices in regard to smoking were poor. John Watson stated that normal practice was to empty discarded smoking materials into a paper garbage sack before retiring or whenever the ash tray was full. Smoking has long been identified as a major fire problem and is a message that needs to continually be presented to the public. Proper disposal of smoking materials and inherent dangers of inappropriate disposal also needs to be addressed.

**4. Heating Safety**

Careful study into the wood furnace heating system installed in the structure revealed a serious potential for a fire to occur as a result of the design and construction. The ductwork for distributing the heat was made of wood. Wood heating and other such alternate heating devices are a major cause of fire in many areas of the country. Behaviors that need to be addressed should include installation of the device, proper maintenance, disposal of ashes, clearances, proper types of fuel, and again, early warning devices. The heating system in this particular house was an accident waiting to happen.

**5. Electrical Fire Safety**

Cause and effect of improper fusing of electrical distribution systems, along with general electrical knowledge, to include, what it means or what you should do when electrical problems occur should be taught. Overloading circuits and defeating protective devices is a problem that needs to be addressed. It was apparent there were serious electrical problems existing in the Watson home prior to the fire.

**6. Holiday Fire Safety**

Christmas is only one of many holidays that have a potential for a fire. In this instance the use of a live Christmas tree brought into the house and put into a stand that did not provide a means to keep it watered created yet another serious problem. In addition, Minnesota had experienced a very dry year in 1988 with little moisture. The homeowner cut his own Christmas tree long before the holiday. It was set up inside on December 10 and remained set up for 21 days without water. Lights were also added to the tree which created an additional potential fire problem for the already dry tree.

**7. Housekeeping**

Housekeeping is a serious issue that is not often addressed in most fire safety programs. The fire load that existed in this particular dwelling seriously impacted fire spread and contributed a tremendous amount of fuel. Fuel load can generate rapid spread of fire and can reduce the amount of time one would have to escape in a fire situation. Poor housekeeping and extreme fire loading can also hamper firefighters during rescue and extinguishment.

**8. Post-Incident Stress**

In any community people who know the victims of a fire, including children, may need emergency psychological assistance to recover from the emotional shock and grief. It is important that all communities have addressed in their emergency plans as a means of dealing with post-traumatic stress in a timely manner. Firefighters, as well, are in need of such programs and help needs to be available immediately in some cases.

# APPENDICES

A. Owner and occupants of the house and their relationships

B. Casualty reports

C. Diagram showing location of bodies

D. List of slides, selected photographs, and diagram showing positions from which slides were taken

# APPENDIX A

## Owner and Occupants of the House and Their Relationships

**Owner of House**

George Patterson – father of Nancy Watson and Rebecca Smischney

| **Residents of House** | | **Visitors** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| John Watson | 33 years old | *Jean Smischney | 33 years old |
| Nancy Watson | 33 years old | *Rebecca Smischney | 31 years old |
| *Jenny Watson | 14 years old | *Jay Allen Smischney | 10 years old |
| *Samantha Watson | 11 years old | *Kimberly M. Smischney | 9 years old |
| *Edward Watson | 9 years old | *Robin L. Bastle | 12 years old |
| *William Watson | 8 years old | *Michele L. Bastle | 10 years old |

*Perished in fire.

# APPENDIX B

## Casualty Reports

Minnesota Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS)

Fill in This Report in Your Own Words

**CIVILIAN CASUALTY REPORT**

**MFIRS-2**
PSO6016 (8-84)

**FIRE DEPARTMENT**

| A | 50 | FDID 3-7 | INCIDENT NO. 8-13 | EXP. 14-15 | MO. | DAY | YEAR | DAY OF WEEK | ALARM TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1111018 | 89001 | 010 | 01 | 01 | 89 | SUN 1 | 0121019 |

**CASUALTY 1**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 0101 7 — 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| GA | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | 0121019 |

| GB | 51 | HOME ADDRESS 19-43 | TELEPHONE 44-53 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | [redacted] | |

GC
- 54 SEX: 1 ☒ Male, 2 ☐ Female
- 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty
- 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death
- 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☒ Civilian

| GD | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 7 | IN BED | ASLEEP 1 |

| GE | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62 | CAUSE OF INJURY 63 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |

| GF | NATURE OF INJURY 64 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65 | DISPOSITION 66 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 12 | DIED |

**CASUALTY 2**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 0101 8 — 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| GA | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | 0121019 |

| GB | 51 | HOME ADDRESS 19-43 | TELEPHONE 44-53 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | [redacted] | |

GC
- 54 SEX: 1 ☒ Male, 2 ☐ Female
- 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty
- 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death
- 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☒ Civilian

| GD | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 7 | IN BED | ASLEEP |

| GE | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62 | CAUSE OF INJURY 63 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |

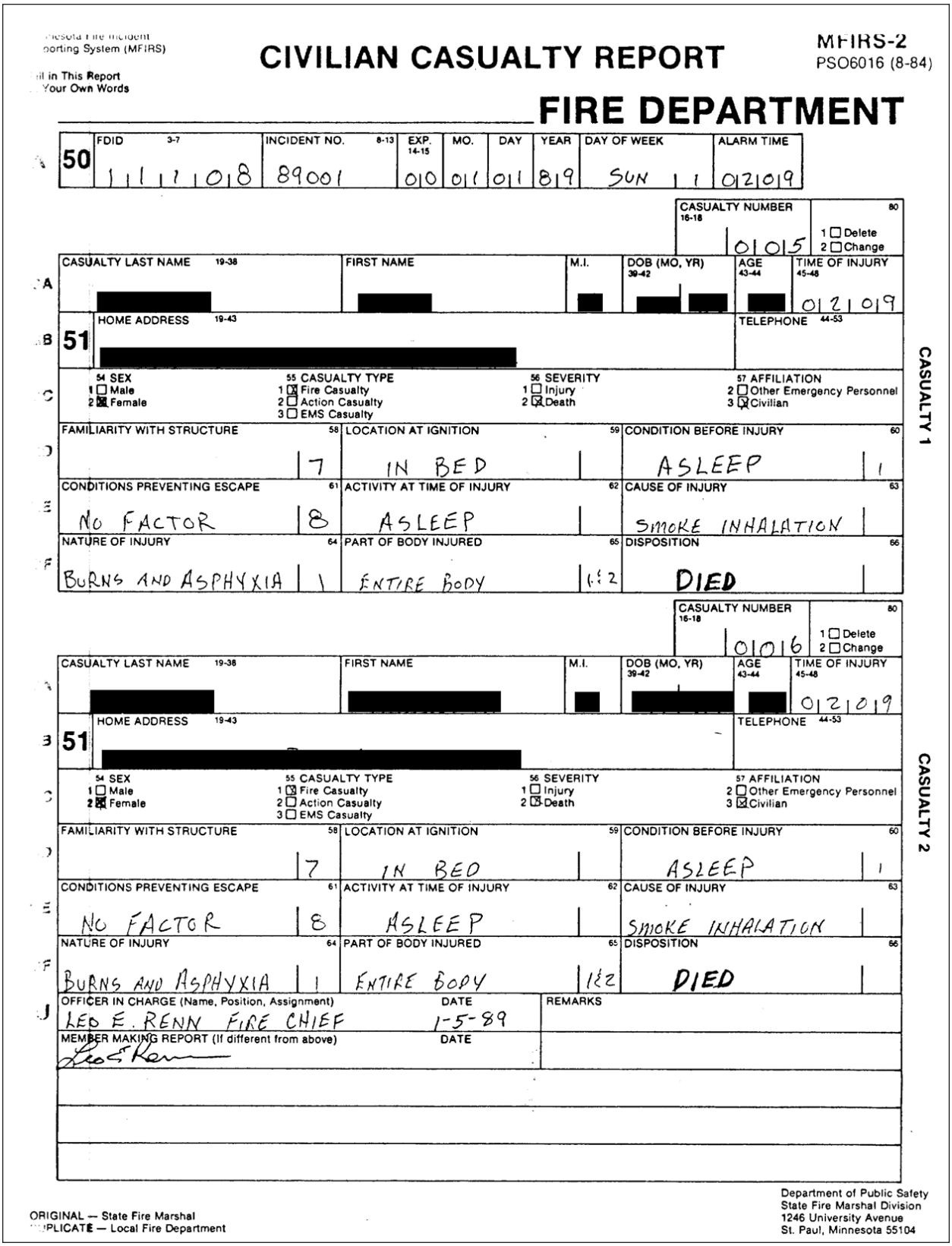
| GF | NATURE OF INJURY 64 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65 | DISPOSITION 66 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 12 | DIED |

| U | OFFICER IN CHARGE (Name, Position, Assignment) | DATE | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|
| | LEO E RENN FIRE CHIEF | 1-589 | |
| | MEMBER MAKING REPORT (If different from above) | DATE | |
| | Leo E Renn | | |

ORIGINAL — State Fire Marshal
DUPLICATE — Local Fire Department

Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal Division
1246 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

# Appendix B (Continued)



Minnesota Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS)

Fill in This Report In Your Own Words

## CIVILIAN CASUALTY REPORT

MFIRS-2
PSO6016 (8-84)

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

| 50 | FDID 3-7 | INCIDENT NO. 8-13 | EXP. 14-15 | MO. | DAY | YEAR | DAY OF WEEK | ALARM TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 1 1 1 0 1 8 | 8 9 0 0 1 | 0 1 0 | 0 1 1 | 0 1 1 | 8 9 | SUN 1 1 | 0 1 2 0 1 9 |

**CASUALTY 1**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 0 1 0 1 5 — 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| A | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | 0 1 2 0 1 9 |

B 51 HOME ADDRESS 19-43: [redacted] — TELEPHONE 44-53

C
- 54 SEX: 1 ☐ Male, 2 ☒ Female
- 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty
- 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death
- 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☒ Civilian

| D | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 7 | IN BED | ASLEEP 1 |

| E | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62 | CAUSE OF INJURY 63 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |

| F | NATURE OF INJURY 64 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65 | DISPOSITION 66 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 1 & 2 | DIED |

**CASUALTY 2**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 0 1 0 1 6 — 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| A | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | 0 1 2 0 1 9 |

B 51 HOME ADDRESS 19-43: [redacted] — TELEPHONE 44-53

C
- 54 SEX: 1 ☐ Male, 2 ☒ Female
- 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty
- 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death
- 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☒ Civilian

| D | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 7 | IN BED | ASLEEP 1 |

| E | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62 | CAUSE OF INJURY 63 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |

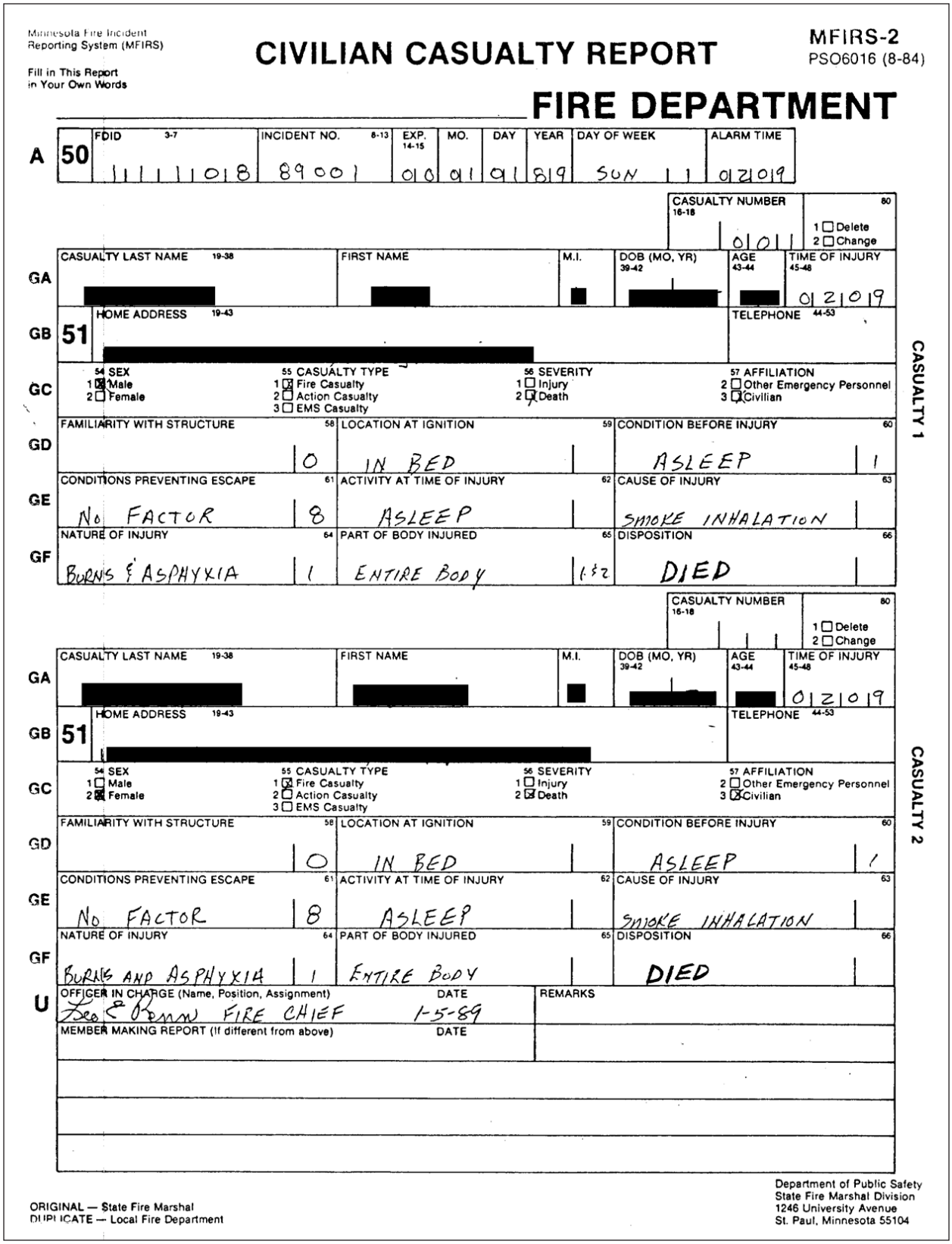
| F | NATURE OF INJURY 64 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65 | DISPOSITION 66 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 1 & 2 | DIED |

| J | OFFICER IN CHARGE (Name, Position, Assignment) | DATE | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|
| | LEO E. RENN FIRE CHIEF | 1-5-89 | |
| | MEMBER MAKING REPORT (If different from above) Leo E Renn | DATE | |

ORIGINAL — State Fire Marshal
DUPLICATE — Local Fire Department

Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal Division
1246 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

# Appendix B (Continued)



Minnesota Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS)

Fill in This Report in Your Own Words

## CIVILIAN CASUALTY REPORT

MFIRS-2
PSO6016 (8-84)

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

A 50 | FDID 3-7: 11111018 | INCIDENT NO. 8-13: 89001 | EXP. 14-15: 010 | MO.: 01 | DAY: 01 | YEAR: 89 | DAY OF WEEK: SUN | 1 | ALARM TIME: 0121019

### CASUALTY 1

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 001 | 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

GA | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38: [redacted] | FIRST NAME: [redacted] | M.I.: [redacted] | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42: [redacted] | AGE 43-44: [redacted] | TIME OF INJURY 45-48: 0121019

GB 51 | HOME ADDRESS 19-43: [redacted] | TELEPHONE 44-53

GC | 54 SEX: 1 ☒ Male, 2 ☐ Female | 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty | 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death | 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☐ Civilian

GD | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58: 0 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59: IN BED | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60: ASLEEP | 1

GE | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61: NO FACTOR | 8 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62: ASLEEP | CAUSE OF INJURY 63: SMOKE INHALATION

GF | NATURE OF INJURY 64: BURNS & ASPHYXIA | 1 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65: ENTIRE BODY | 1 & 2 | DISPOSITION 66: DIED

### CASUALTY 2

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 002 | 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

GA | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38: [redacted] | FIRST NAME: [redacted] | M.I.: [redacted] | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42: [redacted] | AGE 43-44: [redacted] | TIME OF INJURY 45-48: 0121019

GB 51 | HOME ADDRESS 19-43: [redacted] | TELEPHONE 44-53

GC | 54 SEX: 1 ☐ Male, 2 ☒ Female | 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty | 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death | 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☒ Civilian

GD | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58: 0 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59: IN BED | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60: ASLEEP | 1

GE | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61: NO FACTOR | 8 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62: ASLEEP | CAUSE OF INJURY 63: SMOKE INHALATION

GF | NATURE OF INJURY 64: BURNS AND ASPHYXIA | 1 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65: ENTIRE BODY | DISPOSITION 66: DIED

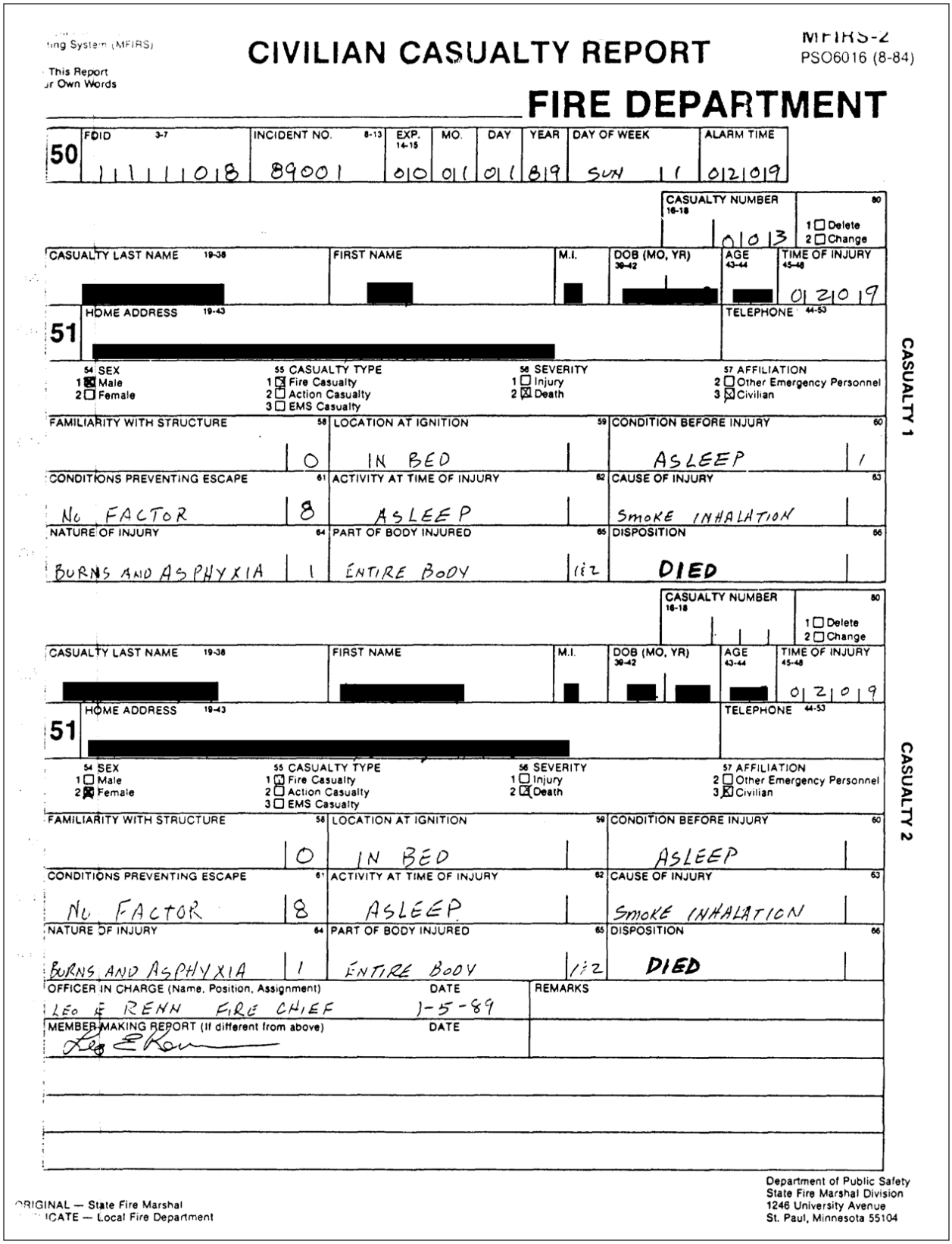
U | OFFICER IN CHARGE (Name, Position, Assignment): Leo E Kenny FIRE CHIEF | DATE: 1-5-89 | REMARKS

MEMBER MAKING REPORT (If different from above) | DATE

ORIGINAL — State Fire Marshal
DUPLICATE — Local Fire Department

Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal Division
1246 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

# Appendix B (Continued)



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This Report
ur Own Words

## CIVILIAN CASUALTY REPORT

MFIRS-2
PSO6016 (8-84)

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

| 50 | FDID 3-7 | INCIDENT NO. 8-13 | EXP. 14-15 | MO. | DAY | YEAR | DAY OF WEEK | ALARM TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 11111018 | 89001 | 010 | 01 | 01 | 89 | SUN 1 | 0121019 |

**CASUALTY 1**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 013 | 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| [redacted] | [redacted] | | [redacted] | | 0121019 |

51 HOME ADDRESS 19-43: [redacted] | TELEPHONE 44-53

54 SEX: 1 ☒ Male 2 ☐ Female
55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty 2 ☐ Action Casualty 3 ☐ EMS Casualty
56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury 2 ☒ Death
57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel 3 ☒ Civilian

| FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | IN BED | ASLEEP 1 |
| **CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61** | **ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62** | **CAUSE OF INJURY 63** |
| NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |
| **NATURE OF INJURY 64** | **PART OF BODY INJURED 65** | **DISPOSITION 66** |
| BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 1?2 | DIED |

**CASUALTY 2**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: | 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| [redacted] | [redacted] | | [redacted] | | 0121019 |

51 HOME ADDRESS 19-43: [redacted] | TELEPHONE 44-53

54 SEX: 1 ☐ Male 2 ☒ Female
55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty 2 ☐ Action Casualty 3 ☐ EMS Casualty
56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury 2 ☒ Death
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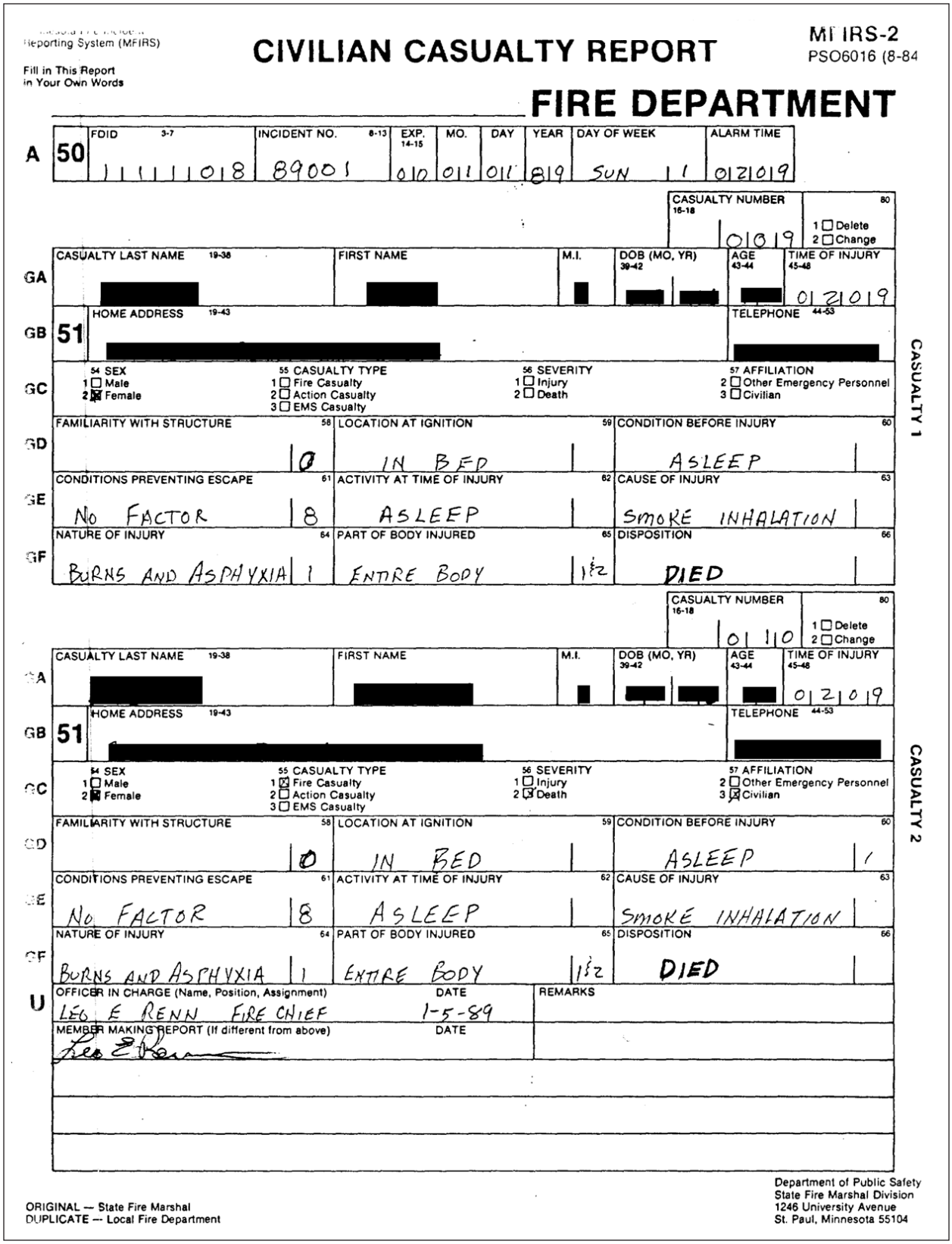
| FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|
| 0 | IN BED | ASLEEP |
| **CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61** | **ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62** | **CAUSE OF INJURY 63** |
| NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |
| **NATURE OF INJURY 64** | **PART OF BODY INJURED 65** | **DISPOSITION 66** |
| BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 1?2 | DIED |

| OFFICER IN CHARGE (Name, Position, Assignment) | DATE | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|
| LEO E RENN FIRE CHIEF | 1-5-89 | |
| MEMBER MAKING REPORT (If different from above) | DATE | |
| Leo E Renn | | |

ORIGINAL — State Fire Marshal
ICATE — Local Fire Department

Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal Division
1246 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

# Appendix B (Continued)



Reporting System (MFIRS)

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## CIVILIAN CASUALTY REPORT

MFIRS-2
PSO6016 (8-84

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

| A 50 | FDID 3-7 | INCIDENT NO. 8-13 | EXP. 14-15 | MO. | DAY | YEAR | DAY OF WEEK | ALARM TIME |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 11111018 | 89001 | 010 | 011 | 011 | 89 | SUN 1 | 0121019 |

**CASUALTY 1**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 0109 | 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| GA | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | 0121019 |

| GB 51 | HOME ADDRESS 19-43 | TELEPHONE 44-53 |
|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] |

GC — 54 SEX: 1 ☐ Male, 2 ☒ Female | 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☐ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty | 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☐ Death | 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☐ Civilian

| GD | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 | IN BED | ASLEEP |

| GE | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62 | CAUSE OF INJURY 63 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |

| GF | NATURE OF INJURY 64 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65 | DISPOSITION 66 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 1&2 | DIED |

**CASUALTY 2**

CASUALTY NUMBER 16-18: 0110 | 80: 1 ☐ Delete 2 ☐ Change

| GA | CASUALTY LAST NAME 19-38 | FIRST NAME | M.I. | DOB (MO, YR) 39-42 | AGE 43-44 | TIME OF INJURY 45-48 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] | 0121019 |

| GB 51 | HOME ADDRESS 19-43 | TELEPHONE 44-53 |
|---|---|---|
| | [redacted] | [redacted] |

GC — 54 SEX: 1 ☐ Male, 2 ☒ Female | 55 CASUALTY TYPE: 1 ☒ Fire Casualty, 2 ☐ Action Casualty, 3 ☐ EMS Casualty | 56 SEVERITY: 1 ☐ Injury, 2 ☒ Death | 57 AFFILIATION: 2 ☐ Other Emergency Personnel, 3 ☒ Civilian

| GD | FAMILIARITY WITH STRUCTURE 58 | LOCATION AT IGNITION 59 | CONDITION BEFORE INJURY 60 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 | IN BED | ASLEEP 1 |

| GE | CONDITIONS PREVENTING ESCAPE 61 | ACTIVITY AT TIME OF INJURY 62 | CAUSE OF INJURY 63 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | NO FACTOR 8 | ASLEEP | SMOKE INHALATION |

| GF | NATURE OF INJURY 64 | PART OF BODY INJURED 65 | DISPOSITION 66 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BURNS AND ASPHYXIA 1 | ENTIRE BODY 1&2 | DIED |

| U | OFFICER IN CHARGE (Name, Position, Assignment) | DATE | REMARKS |
|---|---|---|---|
| | LEO E RENN FIRE CHIEF | 1-5-89 | |
| | MEMBER MAKING REPORT (If different from above) | DATE | |
| | Leo E Renn | | |

ORIGINAL — State Fire Marshal
DUPLICATE — Local Fire Department

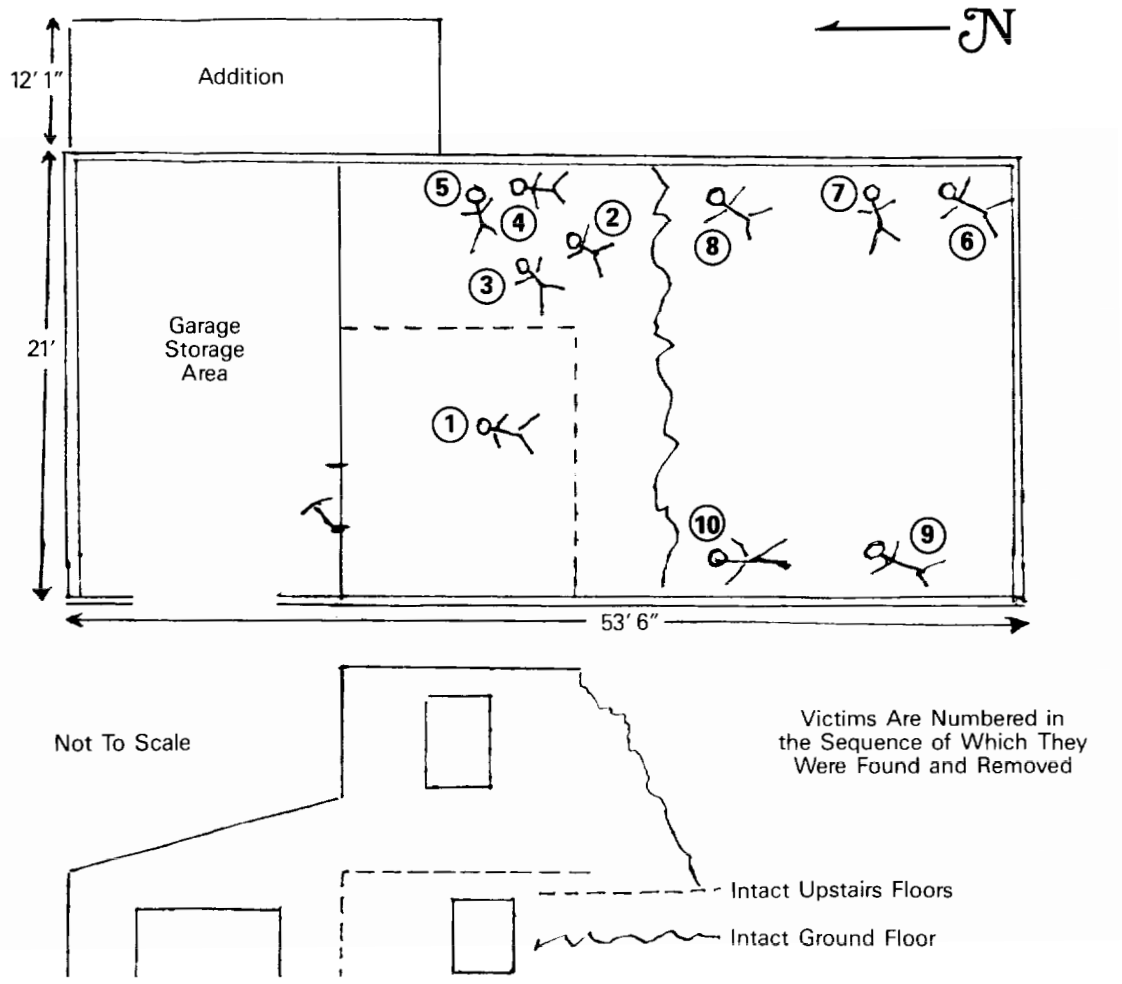
Department of Public Safety
State Fire Marshal Division
1246 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

# APPENDIX C

## Location of Victims

After the fire department had most of the fire out, Investigator David Bahma entered the building and removed the first body. All victims were burned beyond recognition. (In the floor plan on the following page the victims are numbered 1 through 10 in the order they were found.) Bodies #2 through #5 were found on the remainder of the main floor and were located toward the back (southwest corner) of the house. It was quite obvious that victims #2 through #5 were on the upstairs level until the floor gave way. Victim #6 was found in the southwest corner of the basement; victim #7 in the center of the basement and near the back wall; victim #8 in the southeast corner of the basement and near the back wall; victim #9 near the center of the basement and near the front wall; and victim #10 in the northeast corner of the basement.

# Appendix C (Continued)




772-8-25-E-5

# APPENDIX D

## List of Slides/Photographs

Slides are included with the master report at the USFA. The pictures on the following pages were made from the slides asterisked below. The diagram on the last page shows the position from which each slide was taken.

1. Overview of building (west to east).

*2. Overview of building (northwest to southeast).

*3. Outside view of building (east to west).

4. Outside view of building (south to north – down).

5. Outside view of building (south to north – up).

6. View of basement area (north to south).

7. View of electrical panel.

8. Inside view of storage area (west to east).

9. View of interior section (north to south).

10. View of collapsed flooring and antiquated light fixture (west to east).

11. View of basement area (north to south).

*12. View of basement area showing extensive debris and remoteness of the property.

13. View of electric service panel.

14. Close-up view of electric service panel.



**2. Overview of building (northwest to southeast).**

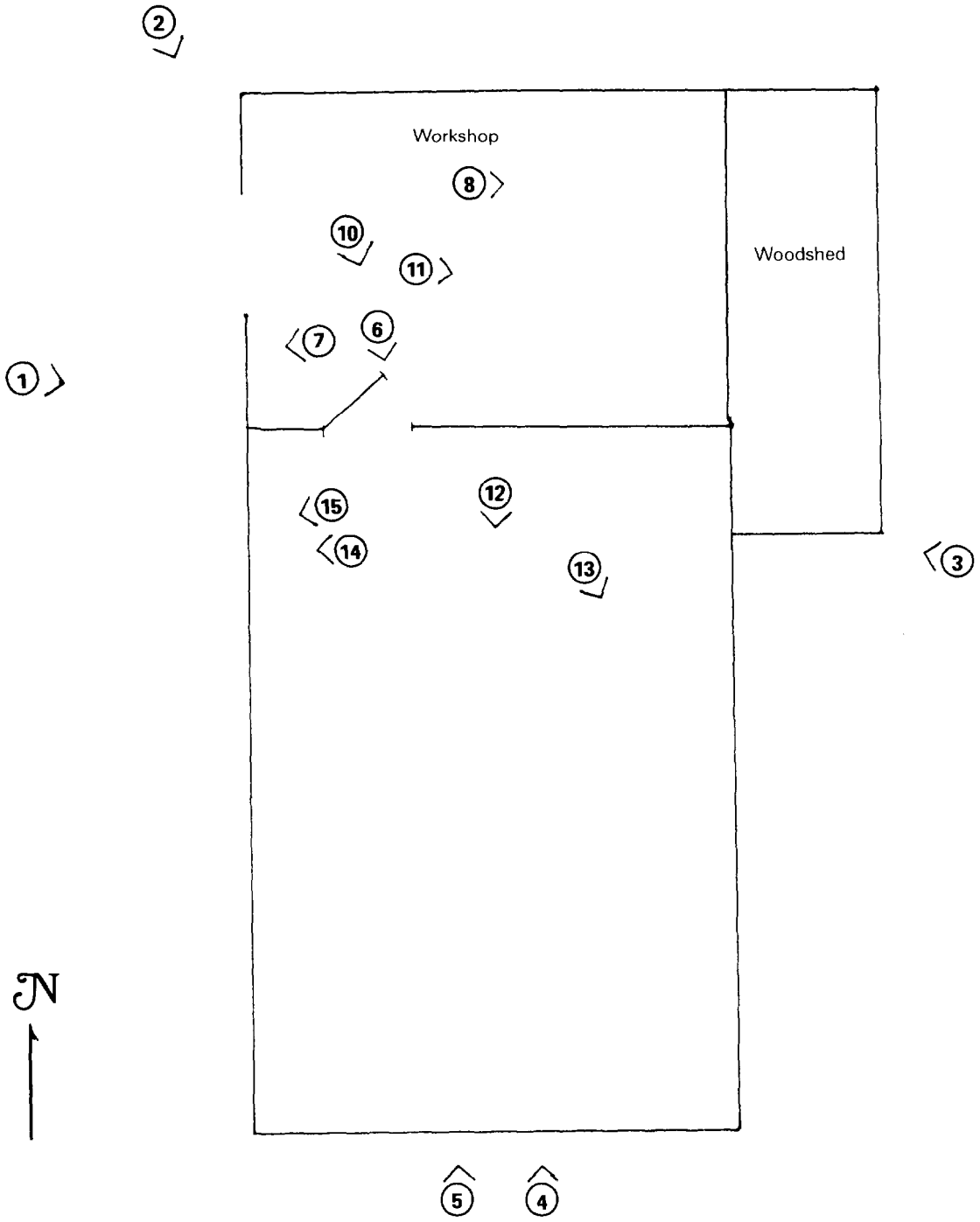


**3. Outside view of building (east to west).**



**12. View of basement area showing extensive debris and remoteness of the property.**

**Watson Residence, Remer, Minn.**




772-8-25-89-9