

https://www.channel3000.com/news/rental-property-site-of-deadly-fire-not-licensed-for-rentals/article_cd007b66-38c7-11ef-bfaa-7788530fe319.html

FEATURED

Rental property, site of deadly fire, not licensed for rentals

Maddie Heimsch
Jul 2, 2024

GERMANTOWN, Wis. -- The Juneau County rental property that caught fire Sunday, killing six guests, was not legally licensed to rent.

The three adults and three children were staying with approximately a dozen other family members in the home on Morro's Mile Road in Germantown. Neighbors say the owner regularly rented out the home through Airbnb.

Lodging permits for Juneau, Adams and Wood counties are approved through the Wood County Health Department. Ben Jeffrey, environmental health supervisor of the department, says the property at W5040 Morro's Mile Road did not hold a lodging license as of Sunday.

"We require smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors dependent on fuel burning appliances and sleeping rooms," said Jeffrey. "And then there's obviously building code and fire code as well."

The permits, which must be reapproved annually, also require inspections of water supply, testing for bacteria and nitrate.

The township of Germantown does not regulate rental housing, but both Juneau County and the state of Wisconsin do. With the uptick in short-term rentals, thanks to sites like Airbnb, however, Jeffrey says smaller municipalities are working towards more regulation.

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"There's been an increasing number of local ordinances, so we kind of work hand-in-hand with a lot of towns and villages," said Jeffrey.

Germantown leaders tell News 3 that they are in the process of creating such ordinances. In a page on the town's website, "work session continued on short term rentals" is listed as an agenda item for the city's plan commission.

The fine for operating a rental site without a license is double the license fee, according to the Wood County Health Department. That fee is dependent on the size of the home.

As of 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, the investigation into the cause of the fire is still ongoing.

The Juneau County Sheriff's Office released the names and ages of the adults who died in the fire and the ages of the children. They are: Steven Lance Witte (66), Charis Anne Kuehl (38), Lydia Marie Witte (35), an 8 year old, a 5 year old and a 2 year old.

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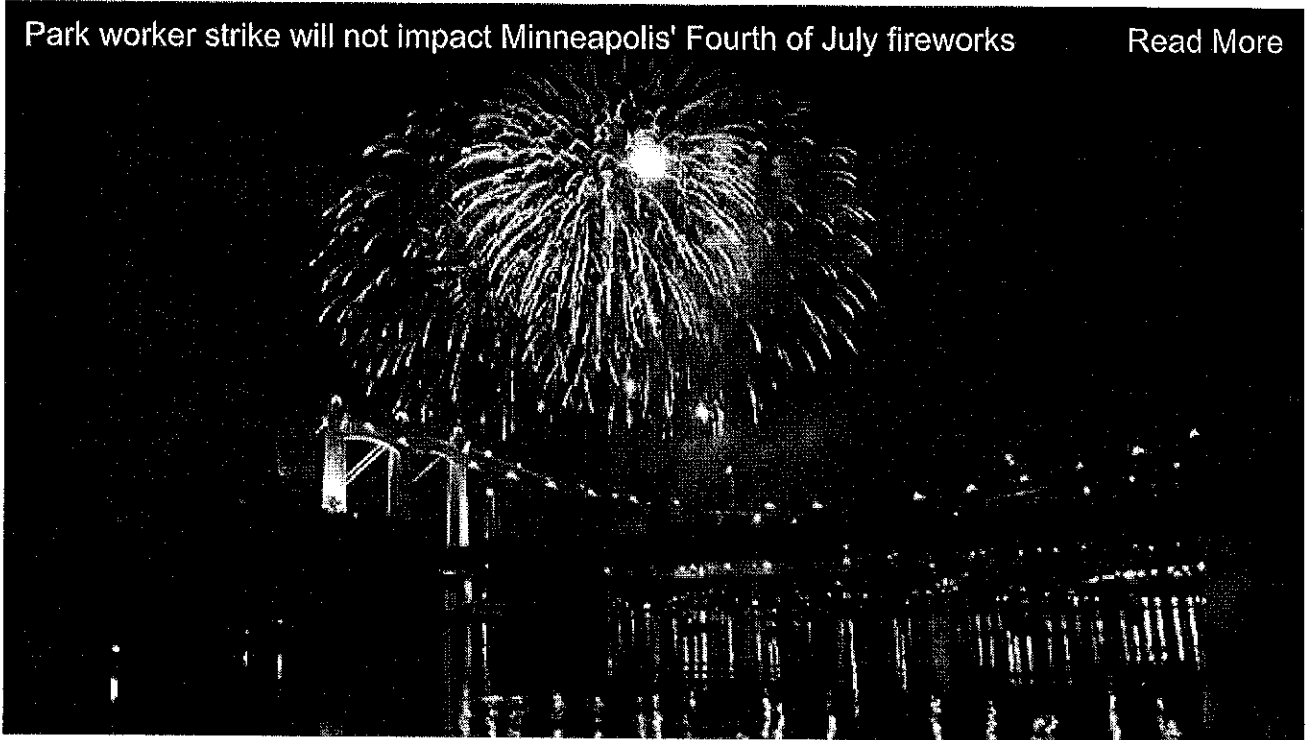
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Six family members killed in Wisconsin house fire

The fire broke out at a vacation rental about 35 miles from Wisconsin Dells.

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Six people, including three children, were killed in a house fire in Wisconsin early Sunday.

Authorities have not shared any details regarding what might've caused the fire at the vacation rental property, but one witness told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel she distinctly heard fireworks before seeing the bright orange flames.

The Juneau County Sheriff's Office said responders were called to the house fire on Morros Mile Road in Necedah around 2:35 a.m. Sunday, June 30.

Deputies found the home fully engulfed in flames and learned three adults and three children remained inside the residence.

"Unfortunately, six family members perished as a result of the fire," the sheriff's office wrote, adding the Wisconsin Department of Justice and State Fire Marshal have been asked to assist with the investigation.

"As of this press release, the fire appears to be accidental in nature; however, the investigation is on-going," the sheriff's office stated Monday.

St. Mark Ministries, a Lutheran church in De Pere, Wisconsin, shared more information Monday regarding the family members killed in the blaze.

"St. Mark partners Karl and Hannah Henselin and many of Hannah's extended family were vacationing in central Wisconsin at a vacation rental home," a statement from the church reads.

St. Mark Ministries identified the victims as follows:

- Lena Henselin (Karl and Hannah's daughter).
- Merci Henselin (Karl and Hannah's daughter).
- Pastor Steve Witte (Hannah's father).
- Lydia Witte (Steve and Mary Witte's daughter, Hannah's sister).
- Charis Kuehl (Pastor Steve Kuehl's wife, Steve and Mary Witte's daughter, Hannah's sister).
- Stella Kuehl (Steve and Charis' daughter).

A GoFundMe campaign has been created to support the husband and two remaining daughters of Charis Kuehl, who died in the fire along with her 5-year-old daughter Stella Kuehl.

The fundraiser is raising funds to help Charis Kuehl's husband, Steve, deal with the aftermath of the tragedy as he prepares to move with his two surviving daughters to New Ulm, Minnesota for a job at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School.

"As many know, Steve and his family were vacationing with Charis' side of the family this past week when a fire broke out in their rental home," the page reads.

The fundraiser continues: "They had just bought a house in New Ulm. The girls will be attending a new grade school. They still need to pack and move from Powell, OH to New Ulm, MN. The list of endings and beginnings goes on and on. Now they do this without Charis and Stella."

As of early Tuesday afternoon, the campaign has raised over \$83,700.