

Austin house fire kills elderly woman

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A house fire in Austin's north end killed an elderly woman on Saturday morning, November 20. The body of Lucy Seale, 89, was found by Jennings Township Volunteer Fire Department personnel attempting to extinguish the blaze at 141 North Street.

According to JTVFD Fire Chief Kevin Salyers, Mrs. Seale lived alone but was visited daily by relatives. The department got the fire call at 8:30 a.m., it having been called in seconds earlier to 9-1-1 dispatchers by an unknown person using a cell phone. Chief Salyers said it was apparent by the time they arrived a few minutes later that the fire had been active for some time.

"When we pulled up, there were flames coming out of the back of the house, and the area was filled with smoke so thick you could barely see the house," he reported.

A Jennings interior attack team was quickly formed, and firemen made their way into the burning structure, finding Mrs. Seale's body in the hallway off the kitchen and toward the back of the house. They brought her out, but attempts by technicians with Scott County EMS to revive her at the scene failed. She was pronounced dead by Deputy Coroner Jerry Buchanan.

Steve Wollmann, chief investigator for the Scott County Prosecutor's Office, said the elderly woman probably died of smoke inhalation.

"It appeared from our preliminary investigation that Mrs. Seale may have started cooking something on the stove earlier that morning and then forgot about it or became distracted. She may have tried to put out the flames and then retreated when she realized she could not," he stated.

Wollmann, Major/Detective Lonnie Noble and Sheriff John Lizenby and his wife Lisa were on the scene. One of Mrs. Seale's sons, Vearl, is an employee at the Scott County Security Center. Firemen had the blaze put down in about 35 minutes. A crew of 12 worked the scene.

Wollmann confirmed that the fire is still under investigation by the Indiana State Fire Marshal's Office. "We don't anticipate any verdict except it was an accidental fire that unfortunately got out of hand and led to this lady's death," he advised.

Mrs. Seale's funeral was conducted at the Buchanan Funeral Home in Austin on Tuesday morning, November 23. Burial was in Wesley Chapel Cemetery near Austin.