



# North Dakota Office of the State Fire Marshal (ND)

## INCIDENT REPORT

Official Law Enforcement Report - Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited

Incident Type: Fire / Accidental

Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-006

BATS ID: 1543590

Investigation Title: RUGBY DECOTEAU FIRE



### Incident Date/Time/Location

#### Status

Investigation Closed

#### Jurisdiction

Primary

#### Start Date/Time

1/23/2025 16:37 Thursday

#### Address

663 Parkland Dr

#### City/State/Zip

Rugby, ND 58368

#### County

Pierce County

### Investigator Information

#### Name

Andrew J Browne

#### Phone

701-720-9264

#### Email

abrowne@nd.gov

#### Title

Deputy State Fire Marshal

### Property Use or Target Information

#### Type

Residential

#### Subtype

Manufactured/Mobile Home

#### Status

Occupied And Operating



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#### Scene Details

#### Miscellaneous Information

Latitude

48.364473

Longitude

-100.004001



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Person/Organization Information

Name

DECOTEAU, LINDA

DOB

1951

Sex

F

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Owner, Victim

Race

Native American

Ethnicity

Age at time of Incident

73



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### Name

GOODEN, EMIL

### DOB

1954

### Sex

M

### Juvenile

No

### Relationship(s)

Witness

### Address Information

#### Street Address

627 PARKLAND DR

#### City/State/Zip

RUGBY, ND 58368

#### County

PIERCE

### Contact Information

#### Primary Phone

701-389-4749

### Race

Hispanic

### Ethnicity

### Age at time of Incident

70



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Attachments

Filename

Description

Date

NDSFM25-06-1 RUGBY  
DECOTEAU FIRE.pdf

3/3/2025

No image specified



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## Narrative(s)

### Title

OPENING REPORT

### Author

Andrew Browne

7017209264

abrowne@nd.gov

### Description

A fire occurred in a single-wide mobile home.

Distribution Via Email Only:

Fire Chief Joel Berg, Rugby Fire Department, rugbyfire@gondtc.com

Police Officer Travis Lafferty, Rugby Police Department, tlafferty@nd.gov



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Investigator/Agent - Browne, Andrew

Date

Approving Official

Date



**North Dakota State Fire Marshals Office (ND)**  
**INCIDENT ORIGIN & CAUSE NARRATIVE**  
**Official Law Enforcement Report – Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited**



**Incident Type: Fire/Arson**

**Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-006**

**BATS ID: i-1543590**

**Investigation Title: Rugby Decoteau Fire**

**Identify the Need**

**Call for service (dispatch, request, date, time):**

On Thursday, January 23, 2025, at approximately 5:45 pm I Deputy State Fire Marshal Andrew Browne was contacted by Deputy State Fire Marshal Jessica Sinerius regarding a fire investigation being requested by the Rugby Fire Department.

I contacted Secretary Brandon Wrangler of the Rugby Fire Department to discuss the request. During the conversation it was agreed that the fire investigation would begin on Friday, January 24, 2025, at 10:00 am.

**North Dakota Century Code 18-01-07 states; “An investigation of each fire must be made by the officers required to report the occurrence of fires under section 18-01-06.”**

**Define the Problem**

**Nature of Incident/incident overview:**

On January 23, 2025, at 4:36pm the Rugby Fire Department was dispatched to a residential mobile home fire at 663 Parkland Dr. SW, Rugby, ND. The fire occurred in an occupied residential mobile home. No injuries or fatalities were reported. (See Figure 1)



*Figure 1 Photograph DSC\_0001.JPG South Exterior Wall Facing North*





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**Investigation Title: Rugby Decoteau Fire**

**Authority to Enter/Search:**

I arrived at the Rugby Fire Station at approximately 10:00 on January 24, 2025, and met Fire Chief Joel Berg of the Rugby Fire Department and Officer Travis Lafferty of the Rugby Police Department.

I was informed the scene was still being held under fire watch by the Rugby Fire Department and Rugby Police Department. I went to the scene at approximately 10:30 am under exigent circumstances.

I departed the scene at approximately 11:30 am. The scene was turned over the property owner by the Rugby Police Department.

**Assisting Persons/Agencies:**

Name	Agency	Case Reference if Available
Fire Chief Joel Berg	Rugby Fire Department	
Officer Travis Lafferty	Rugby Police Department	

**Fatalities/Injuries:**

Name	Fatality/Injury:	Notes/Other Information:
		No injuries or fatalities were report to the State Fire Marshal's Office.



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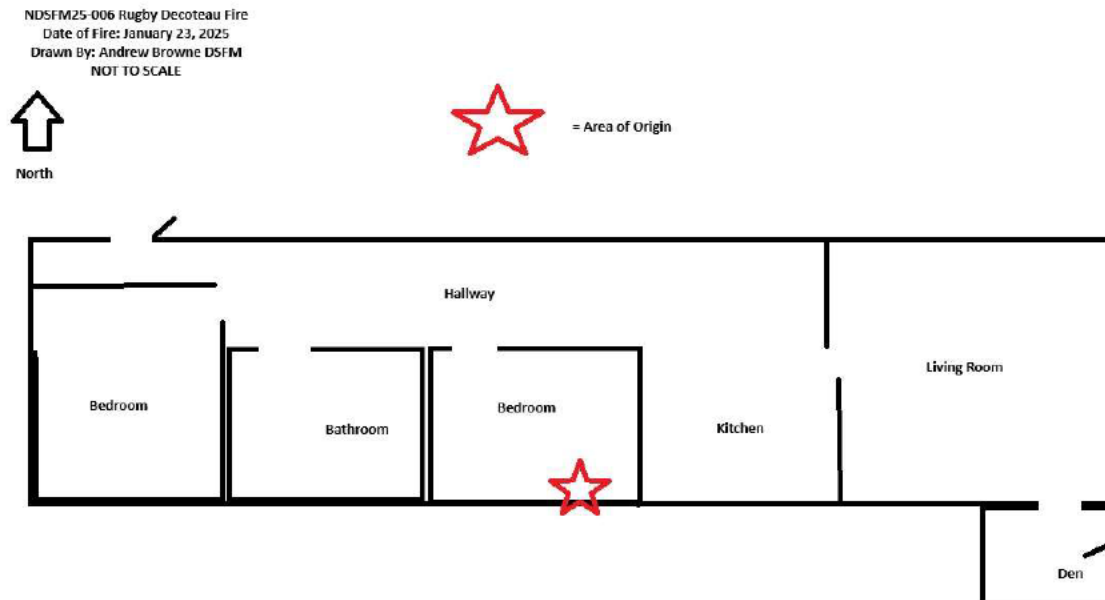
**Data Collection**

**Photographs:**

Prior to physically altering the fire scene, the fire scene was photographed in the condition it as found. During the investigation a series of 134 photographs were taken. The photographs and photograph log will remain with the file.

**Drawings/Sketches:**

Sketch was drawn by Deputy State Fire Marshal Andrew Browne. Sketch as not drawn to scale. The sketch will remain with the file.



**Exterior Scene Examination:**

My examination of the fire scene began on the exterior south side and continued in a clockwise direction. During my initial walkthrough a Scene Safety Assessment Form was completed and will remain with the file.

The structure was a single story residential mobile home. The mobile home was supported by a metal chassis that was fixed to the ground. The mobile home had vinyl siding. The roof was flat with a rubber roofing material. The mobile home length ran west/east. Along the southeast corner of the mobile home was an addition built on to the mobile home. The addition had the same siding and roofing material as the mobile home. The electrical service entered the mobile home through an underground lateral along the south wall. The meter was pulled from the socket, which was located on a pole in the southwest corner of the lot, approximately 15 yards away from the trailer. No damage was noticed to the electrical service. The propane tank was on the west side of the mobile home. I visually observed the propane tank in the off position. The propane lateral service entered the building through and underground lateral on the south wall. No damage was noticed to the propane service.

The south exterior wall had eight windows and vinyl siding. The five westerly most window were damaged, and most of the glass was broken and no longer in place. Above two large windows approximately in the middle of the south wall was charring on both sides of the window frames extending upward to the top portion of both window frames. Above the window frames was melted and charred vinyl fascia. (See Figure 2)



Figure 2 Photograph DSC\_0004.JPG South Exterior Wall Facing Northeast

To the west of the addition the metal mobile home skirting was removed on the south side. Where the skirting was removed was a water main pipe and meter that entered the structure through an underground lateral. The water pipe and meter were intact. To the west of the addition were two holes cut in the mobile home wall, consistent with firefighting operations. (See Figure 3)



Figure 3 DSC\_0026.JPG South Exterior Wall Skirt Opening Facing North

On the south side by the skirting that was removed was a diesel heater. The diesel heater was tipped on its side and the wheels faced west. The diesel heater was in the on position and not running. The diesel heater was approximately 5 feet away



from the mobile home. To the west of the addition along the south wall was a fuel barrel. The fuel barrel was not in used and empty.

The exterior west wall had vinyl siding and one window. The window and west wall were intact.

The exterior north wall had a door with wood steps along the westernmost portion of the wall. The door was in the open position and intact with soot deposits on the interior side. There were four windows along the north wall. The westernmost two windows were broken with most of the glass broken and no longer in place.

The exterior east wall had three windows on the mobile home and a door on the addition. The windows were intact. The door was shut and intact. Extending from the east wall of the addition was a wooden deck. The wooden deck was intact.

#### **Interior Scene Examination:**

My interior scene examination began in the area of least damage and continued to the area of greatest damage. During my initial walkthrough it was determined the southeast addition was the least damaged and the southmost bedroom was my greatest damaged.

I began my interior scene examination entering the east door of the southeast addition. The addition had no fire damage with all the combustible and noncombustible materials intact. The addition had a chest freezer and several cardboard boxes.

I continued north from the addition into a living room. Along the south wall was a television and entertainment center. The east wall had a couch, wood décor shelves, and a coffee table. The north wall had two reclining chairs and a table. The west wall had a coat closet and opening leading into the kitchen. Most of the combustible and noncombustible materials were intact. The westmost side of the television was melted. There were soot deposits throughout with greatest amount along the west wall and ceiling and decreased going east. (See Figure 4)



*Figure 4 Photograph DSC\_0044.JPG Livingroom Facing West Towards Kitchen*

Continuing to the west from the living room was a kitchen. The south wall had a stove, oven, refrigerator, and counterspace with a microwave on top. Along the west wall was cabinets, counterspace, and a sink. The north wall had a window and a dining room table, chairs, and reclining chair. The east wall had an opening to the living room. There were soot deposits along the upper portion of the walls, cabinets, appliances, and contents, with the greatest amount on the ceiling. Some of the contents in the kitchen sustained melting.

West of the kitchen was a hallway that ran west/east. There were soot despoths throughout the walls and ceiling. The paperback of the drywall was cracked and peeling and gradually increased in damage towards the west along the north wall.



The south wall sustained most of the wood wall panels were consumed along the west end of the hallway and decreased in damage towards the east. The ceiling had peeling and cracking of the paperback drywall on the east end and increased in damage along the westernmost portion of the hallway with the drywall mostly consumed revealing the insulation. The hallway sustained more damage on the west end compared to the east end. (See Figure 5)



Figure 5 Photograph DSC\_0056.JPG Hallway Westernmost Portion Facing West

Continuing to the west end of the hallway was a bedroom along the west wall of the mobile home. The door leading to the bedroom sustained damage on the east side of the door facing the hallway with charring and peeling of the laminated protective coating of the wood door. The bedroom was used for storage with an abundance of cardboard boxes, plastic totes, and assorted household items there were scattered throughout the room. Most the combustible and noncombustible materials were intact. There were soot deposits throughout the wall and ceiling and gradually decreased towards the west. (See Figure 6)



Figure 6 Photograph DSC\_0058.JPG Westernmost Portion Of Hallway Facing West Towards West Bedroom Door

To the east of the west bedroom along the south wall was a bathroom. The bathroom had soot deposits throughout. Most of the upper portion of the north and east wood wall panels were consumed. Inside the bathroom the west wall paperback drywall was peeled and cracked. The north and east wood wall studs were charred and were more damaged on the uppermost portion compared to the lower portion. Most of the ceiling drywall was consumed exposing insulation within the bathroom.

To the east of the bathroom along the south wall was a bedroom. This room was identified as the area of most damage compared to the rest of the rooms in the structure. Along the west, north, and east wall the wood wall panels were mostly consumed. The ceiling drywall was consumed with the insulation melted and dropping down. The wall studs along all the four wall within the room were charred. There was more mass loss on the wall studs on the south wall and north wall in approximately in the middle of the room. In the bedroom were wood truss that ran north/south. (See Figure 7)



*Figure 7 Photograph DSC\_0073.JPG South Bedroom Facing East*

In the same area there were remains of electrical wiring. The plastic jacket, paper sheath, insulation, and treated paper separator were consumed in the area between the four-wood truss and were intact on both ends outside of the charred truss.

In approximately the middle of the room there were four truss that sustained damaged. The two most middle truss had more mass loss compared to the other two that were located west and east of the two with more damage. In the middle of the two truss that sustained the most damage the metal ceiling was oxidized and discolored. This area of oxidation and discoloration was the only area noted on the metal ceiling. (See Figure 8)





*Figure 8 Photograph DSC\_0091.JPG Truss Above South Bedroom Floor Door Opening*

Directly below the two truss that sustained the most damage and the oxidized and discolored metal ceiling was a floor door hatch leading to the exterior under portion of the mobile home. The door was fixed to the opening with nails and was found opened. Fire department told me that during firefighting operations the door was removed. The top portion of the wood door was charred with more mass loss on the northern portion of the door. The bottom portion of the door that was exposed to the exterior under portion of the mobile home sustained charring and mass loss along the northernmost portion of the door. The remaining portion of the door had soot deposits and was intact. (See Figure 9)



*Figure 9 Photograph DSC\_0098.JPG Bottom Side Of The Door For Floor Opening*

Reconstructing of the door was done by placing the door in the condition it was found prior to being removed during firefighting operations. In the opening the northernmost two wooden support beams that ran west/east were charred. The charring on the second most beam from the north had charring that extending from the bottom up. The north/south support



beam had charring along the northernmost portion of the beam extending from the bottom up and decrease in damage towards the south. Below the charred support beams was remains of charred insulation. (See Figure 10)



Figure 10 Photograph DSC\_0103.JPG North Portion Of Floor Opening

I then went outside to the opening where the metal skirting was to look under the mobile home. From the removed metal skirting of the mobile home the insulation was charred and mostly consumed in the area around the water pipe and water meter and extending towards the door opening in the floor inside the southmost bedroom. The sustained damaged to the insulation decreased the farther away from this area.

#### Interview #1:

**Name:** Linda Decoteau

**Interview Date:** January 27, 2025

**Notes:** Linda Decoteau was the owner of the mobile home. The following are notes from an informational interview with Linda Decoteau. The interview took place over the telephone and was done voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and was not recorded.

Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau owned the mobile home but rented the lot from the trailer park management. Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau has owned the mobile home for several years but doesn't remember when Linda Decoteau purchased the mobile home. Linda Decoteau does not have a mortgage on the mobile home. Linda Decoteau has insurance through Home Warranty and works with agent Joey Vambeau (spelling).

Linda Decoteau was not aware of any electrical or appliance issues. Linda Deoteau was not aware of any enemies, or anyone upset with Linda Decoteau. Linda Decoteau was a smoker and only smoked in the east living room and discarded the cigarette butts in an ash tray. Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decteau often empties the discarded cigarette butts in the garbage.

Linda Decoteau stated on Friday, January 24, 2025, in the morning noticed the mobile home water pipes was frozen. Linda Decoteau stated this is not the first time this winter the water pipes were frozen. Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau has called different people to help thaw the pipes. On Friday, January 24, 2025, Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau called neighbor Emil Gooden to come over to help with thawing the water pipes since Lind Decoteau has used Emil Gooden in the past to help.

Linda Deocteau stated that Emil Gooden came over at approximately 1:00 pm to work on thawing the water pipes. Linda Decoteau stated the water main in under the mobile on the south wall. Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau stayed inside the mobile home while the work was being done. Linda Decoteau stated approximately 15 to 20 minutes before 3:00pm, Linda Decoteau had the local transit bus pick Linda Deoteau to bring Linda Decoteau to a 3:00 pm doctors' appointment.



Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau arrived back home at approximately 4:45 pm and observed the fire department was on scene at Linda Decoteau's residence. Linda Decoteau stated Linda Decoteau talked to Emil Gooden regarding the work completed on the water pipes and Emil Gooden informed Linda Decoteau there was smoking under the mobile home from the heater thawing the pipes and Linda Decoteau thought Emil Gooden had poured enough water in the area.

I asked Linda Decoteau what caused the fire and Linda Decoteau stated the heater thawing the pipes, since Linda Decoteau noticed most of the damage in that area. I asked Linda Decoteau what the room was directly above the water main, and Linda Decoteau stated it was a spare bedroom.

Linda Decoteau provided me with a phone number for Emil Gooden.

Prior to disconnecting my phone call, I informed Linda Decoteau of safety hazards with the scene and informed Linda Decoteau to contact Linda Decoteau's insurance for the next steps prior to moving anything at the scene.

This concluded my interview with Linda Decoteau.

#### **Interview #2:**

<b>Name:</b>	Emil Gooden
<b>Interview Date:</b>	January 27, 2025

**Notes:** Emil Gooden was the person working on thawing the water pipes at the mobile home. The following are notes from an informational interview with Emil Gooden. The interview took place over the telephone and was done voluntarily. The interview was non-custodial and was not recorded.

Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden lived in the mobile home park with Linda Decoteau and Linda Decoteau contacted Emil Gooden on January 24, 2025, to come over to help with thawing out the water pipes that were frozen. Emil Gooden stated that Emil Gooden had experience in thawing out water pipes.

Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden went over to Linda Decoteau's mobile home at approximately 1:00 pm to begin thawing the frozen pipes. Emil Gooden stated that Emil Gooden removed the metal mobile home skirting on the south wall to access the water main coming into the mobile home. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden used a diesel heater that was placed approximately two feet away from the opening in the metal skirting. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden had the heater on for approximately 45 minutes and turned it off when Emil Gooden noticed there was smoke coming from the area where the opening was under the mobile home. Emil Gooden stated that the water pipe was leaking when Emil Gooden turned off the heater. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden soaked down the insulation around the opening and water main with water. Emil Gooden stated that Linda Decoteau had been seen leaving on the transit bus prior to turning off the heater. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden knew Linda Decoteau had a doctor's appointment.

Emil Gooden stayed at Linda Decoteau's mobile home for approximately 30 minutes after turning off the heater. Emil Gooden stated that Emil Gooden stayed to ensure it was not hot and smoking anymore. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden went back to Emil Gooden's mobile home to look for parts to patch up the leak in the water pipe. Emil Gooden stated approximately one hour after being at Emil Gooden's mobile home, Emil Gooden looked out and noticed the fire department was at Linda Decoteau's mobile home.

Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden walked over to Linda Decoteau's mobile home and seen the fire department working in the area around where Emil Gooden was thawing the pipe. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden noticed the area where Emil Gooden was working had the most fire damage.

I asked Emil Gooden what started the fire. Emil Gooden stated the heater might have caused the. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden thinks that Emil Gooden did not put enough water on the area where it was smoking where Emil Gooden was working.

Emil Gooden stated that Emil Gooden is a smoker. Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden did not smoke on Linda Decoteau's property while thawing the water pipes.

This concluded my interview with Emil Gooden.



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**Investigation Title: Rugby Decoteau Fire**

**Video:**

No video was obtained from this fire investigation.

**Weather Reviewed:**

The weather information was obtained from [www.underground.com](http://www.underground.com), Weather Underground. The data was reviewed for January 23, 2025, for Rugby, ND. The closest reporting station was the Devils Lake Regional Airport Station, which is approximately 60 miles away. The following weather information was learned from the time range of 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

Temperature: 9 Degrees Fahrenheit to 12 Degrees Fahrenheit

Humidity: 77% to 84%

Wind Direction: W to WSW

Wind Speed: 7 mph to 17 mph with wind gust of 0 mph

Conditions: Light Snow

The weather conditions were not a direction cause of the fire. The wind direction did not contribute to the spread of the fire.



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**Times:**

Hard Time Description	Time	Soft Time Description
Time of Call from Pierce Co Call for Service	4:36 pm	
Fire Department Dispatched from Pierce Co Call for Service	4:36 pm	
Fire Department Arrival from Pierce Co Call for Service	4:44 pm	
All Units Clear from Pierce Co Call for Service	7:00 pm	

**Evidence identified/collected/preserved:**

No evidence was collected by the State Fire Marshal's Office. No areas were marked with warning this may be evidence during the on-scene examination.

**Data Analysis, hypothesis development, hypothesis testing, select final hypothesis**

**Other Forms/Documents/Reports Reviewed:**

**NFPA 921, Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations 2024 Edition**

- 3.3.114 Heat Transfer
  - "The exchange of thermal energy between materials through conduction, convection, and or radiation."
- 3.3.164 Radiant Heat
  - "Electromagnetic transmission of heat energy; increases the sensible temperature of any substance capable of absorbing the radiation, especially solid and opaque objects."
- 6.1.2.3 Mass Loss
  - "As liquid and solid materials are heated and undergo physical and chemical changes, the original materials is being converted to a gas..."



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**Area of Origin:**

Based on the examination of the fire scene, data collected, and witness statements the area of origin was determined to be at or near the water pipe and water meter underneath the mobile home on the south side.

The following data supports this:

- **Fire Effects**
  - Mass loss to the insulation under the mobile home near the opening in the skirting around the water pipe and water meter, with some of the insulation consumed closer to the water pipe and water meter.
  - Charring to the lower portion of the wood floor joists that burned upward.
  - Mass loss to the wood floor door on the northern end of the door.
  - Mass loss to the wood truss directly above the wood floor door opening.
  - There was more fire consumption in the south bedroom compared to the rest of the mobile home.
- 
- **Fire Dynamics**
  - The insulation under the mobile home near the water pipe and water meter decreased in damage as it went away from the area.
  - Charring to the lower portion of the wood floor joists was more charred on the north end of the door opening in the floor. The damage decreased outward to the floor joists away from the floor door opening.
  - The mass loss on the northern end of the wood floor door was consistent with damage found directly above the wood floor joists that sustained damage.
    - Consistent with fire movement and spread.
  - The wood truss above the door floor opening has mass loss and decreased in all directions away from the area above the opening.
    - Consistent with fire movement and spread.
  - The fire damage from the south bedroom decreased the farther away from this area within the mobile home.
- **Witness Statements**
  - Emil Gooden reported seeing smoke in the area of the water pipe and water heater while operating the diesel heater.
  - Fire department personnel arrived on scene and observed fire from the south side of the mobile home near the water pipe and water meter.



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**Cause Hypothesis Development and Testing:**

Based on the data collected at the time of the investigation and the area of origin located at or near the water pipe and water meter underneath the mobile home on the south side. The following were the most creditable hypothesis developed.

1. A person or persons unknown used an open flame to ignite ordinary combustible materials such as paper, insulation, cardboard, and wood.
  - No threat of violence or fire were made to the owner of the property.
  - There were no known enemies to the property owner.
  - Property owner did not report any unusual activity.
  - This hypothesis has been eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
2. Improper discarding of cigarette that comes in contact with combustible materials such as wood, paper, insulation, grass, and cardboard long enough to sustain combustion.
  - Emil Gooden and Linda Decoteau are both smokers.
  - Emil Gooden stated Emil Gooden did not smoke while working on the frozen water pipe at Linda Decoteau's.
  - Linda Decoteau only smokes inside the east living room and discards cigarette butts in a ash tray.
  - No cigarette butts were found along the exterior south wall of the mobile home.
  - This hypothesis has been eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
3. A heating device that produces radiant heating such as a diesel heater sustains enough heating long enough to ignite combustible materials such as insulation, wood, paper, and grass.
  - Neighbor Emil Gooden started working on thawing water pipes around approximately 1:00 pm.
  - Property owner reported frozen water pipes with the mobile home.
  - Property owner and neighbor reported using a diesel heater to thaw pipes under the mobile home.
  - Neighbor who was working on thawing the pipe observed seeing smoke from under the mobile home after using the diesel heater for 45 minutes.
  - The insulation in the area of the water pipe and water meter was charred and some of the insulation was consumed.
  - The diesel heater was being operated approximately two feet away from the opening in the mobile home skirting.
  - This hypothesis could not be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.





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**Final Hypothesis/Conclusion:**

Based upon examination of the fire scene, data collected, and witness statements the area of origin was determined to be at or near the water pipe and water meter underneath the mobile home on the south side. The cause of the fire was determined to be a heating device that produces radiant heating such as a diesel heater sustains enough heating long enough to ignite combustible materials such as insulation, wood, paper, and grass.

This fire is classified as accidental.

The opinions expressed in this conclusion are based on data and evidence collected to this point. The opinions are subject to change based upon relevant, significant and credible information discovered or provided in the future.

**References:**

Technical Committee on Fire Investigations. 2023. NFPA 921: Guide For Fire & Explosion Investigations. 2024 Edition. NFPA. Quincy, MA