

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: NDSFM25-030

BATS ID: 1573061

Investigation Title: BISMARCK DAVEY FIRE



Incident Date/Time/Location

Status

Investigation Closed

Jurisdiction

Primary

Start Date/Time

5/31/2025 14:06 Saturday

Address

7320 Cottonwood Ln

City/State/Zip

Bismarck, ND 58503

County

Burleigh County

Investigator Information

Name

Jordan A VanBerkum

Phone

701-220-5063

Email

jvanberkum@nd.gov

Title

Deputy Fire Marshal

Property Use or Target Information

Type

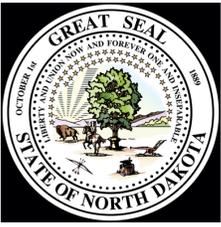
Residential

Subtype

1 (Single Family) or 2 Family Dwelling

Status

Occupied And Operating



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Scene Details

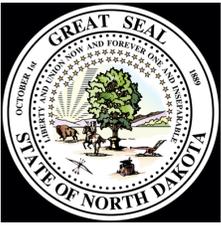
Miscellaneous Information

Latitude

46.884412

Longitude

-100.884625



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Person/Organization Information

Name

DAVEY, JENNIFER

DOB

1980

Sex

F

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Owner

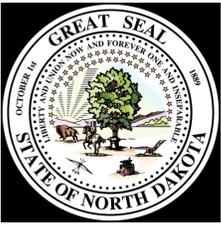
Race

White

Ethnicity

Age at time of Incident

44



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Name

RATLEY, MARK

DOB

██████ 1972

Race

White

Ethnicity

Sex

M

Age at time of Incident

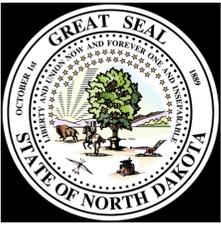
52

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Occupant



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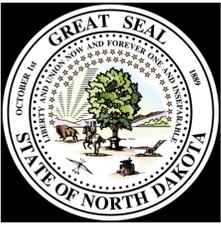
Investigation Title: BISMARCK DAVEY FIRE



Attachments

Filename	Description	Date
NDSFM25-030.1-Bismarck-Davey Fire-Origin and Cause Report.pdf		12/8/2025

No image specified



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Narrative(s)

Title

Contacts

Author

Jordan VanBerkum

7012205063

jvanberkum@nd.gov

Description

Dustin L. Theurer - dtheurer@bismarckruralfire.org



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Deputy Fire Marshal - VanBerkum, Jordan

Date

Approving Official

Date



North Dakota State Fire Marshals Office (ND)
 INCIDENT ORIGIN & CAUSE NARRATIVE
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Incident Type: Fire
Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-0030 **BATS ID:** i-1573061
Investigation Title: Bismarck Davey fire

Identify the Need

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

I was contacted at 3:41 pm on March 31st, 2025 by DSFM Andrew Brown that an investigation was being requested by Fire Chief Dustin Theurer with the Bismarck Rural Fire Department. I contacted Fire Chief Theurer to talk about the request. During the conversation we agreed that I would be in route as soon as possible.

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:

A fire occurred at a single-family home located at 7320 Cottonwood Lane, Bismarck, ND, 58503. The homeowner, Jennifer Davey, discovered the fire and called 911. No injuries or fatalities were reported. (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Picture of the front of the home before the fire (obtained from capitalrealestatend.com).

Authority to Enter/Search:

I arrived on scene at approximately 4:22 pm on March 31st, 2025 and met with Fire Chief Dustin Theurer with the Bismarck Rural Fire Department. The fire scene had been secured since they were still finishing up the fire suppression process.

The homeowner, Jennifer Davey, was on the scene and signed a consent form to search.

The scene was released back to Jennifer Davey upon completion of the investigation. I informed Jennifer Davey that while retrieving items from the home, personal protective equipment (boots, eye protection, and hard-soled footwear) would need to be worn when working in the home.

Assisting Persons/Agencies:

Name	Agency	Case Reference if Available
Dustin Theurer	Bismarck Rural Fire Department	2025-182

Fatalities/Injuries:

Name	Fatality/Injury:	Notes/Other Information:
		No injuries or fatalities were reported to the State Fire Marshal's Office as part of the investigation.

Data Collection

Photographs:

The fire scene was documented with a series of 35 photographs in the condition in which it was in upon my arrival. The photographs and the photograph log will be maintained with the file.

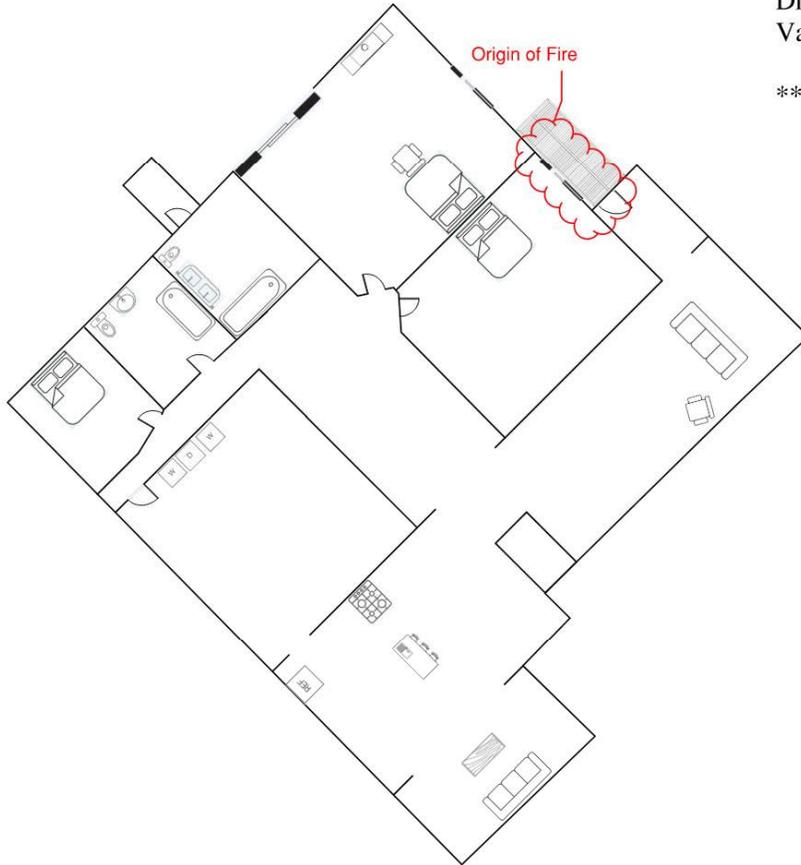
Drawings/Sketches:

Case #: NDSFM25-030

Location: 7320
Cottonwood Ln,
Bismarck, ND 58503
Occupant: Jennifer
Davey and Mark Ratley

Date of Fire: 3/31/2025
Drawn By: DSFM Jordan
VanBerkum

Not to Scale





North Dakota State Fire Marshals Office (ND)
INCIDENT ORIGIN & CAUSE NARRATIVE
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Exterior Scene Examination:

The structure was oriented at an angle relative to the adjacent roadway and the north–south axis. The home had an exterior fence that surrounded the entire property.

The southeast part of the house sustained mass loss. The west portion of the southeast wall was no longer standing, with portions of it falling forward away from the house. The covered front porch located roughly in the middle of the home was entirely consumed. A portion of the north side of the southeast wall remained standing, but it sustained mass loss and charring.

(See figure 2).



Figure 2. The front of the home, particularly the southeast portion, shows the extent of the damage on this portion of the house.

Moving clockwise, the west side of the house still had part of its wall standing. A portion of the south end of that wall was burned, charred, and had fallen outward, while the north end was still upright. Some siding and pieces of the window frame could still be seen. (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. The progression from the south side of the home to the north can be observed.

The northwest wall was still standing but showed charring and heat damage, which became more severe toward the south side. The southwest portion of the home still had a portion of the roof intact, but all windows and doors in this area were damaged, and the framing was still intact.

Moving to the southwest (back of the home), the middle of the house sustained the most damage, with the north and south sides still having noticeable siding and roofing intact. The exterior wall of the attic area had burned all the way through on this side of the home.

The northwest side of the home was the least affected by the fire, with the siding, eaves, and gutters still intact, with visible fire damage at the sliding glass door, the only opening on this side of the house. (See Figure 4.)



Figure 4. The northwest side of the home showing the amount of fire damage on this side of the house.

The homes electrical service was on the northwest side of the home and the propane line came in on the northeast side of the home.

Interior Scene Examination:

The interior scene started at the north end of the home.

Most of the ceiling had been completely burned away and/or removed during overhaul, leaving charred joists. Several of the joists sustained charring that was greater on the north side of the joists than on the south side, with burn patterns from the top down. Electrical wiring and recessed light fixtures are hanging down with the insulation burned off the wiring. Some of the gypsum board on the walls had been removed by either the fire or during the firefighting process. Smoke and soot cover the walls from the floor to the ceiling. The dresser appeared to still have color on the bottom drawers, indicating that the fire came from the top down. (See figure 5).



Figure 5. Showing the charring and full room involvement in the master bedroom.

Outside the master bedroom, the gypsum board on the walls was gone, and the studs had burn patterns coming from the top down. There was more damage to the roof/ceiling of the hallway than to the floor. (See figure 6).

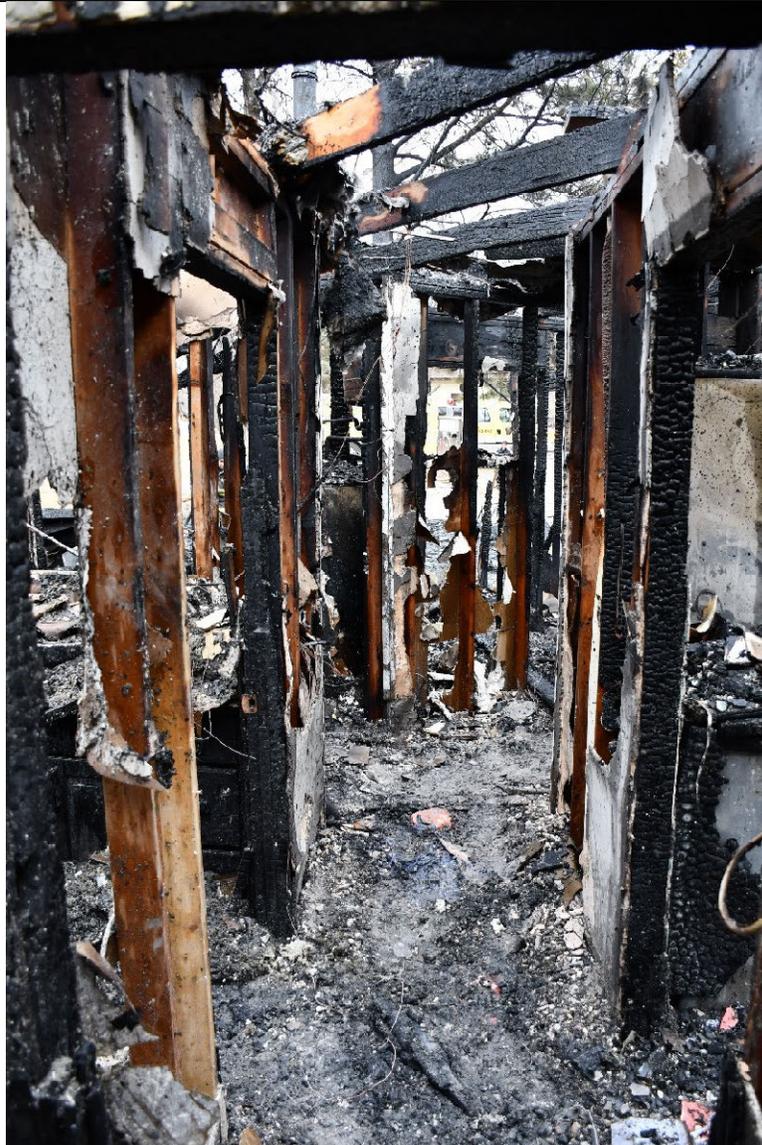


Figure 5. observe the charring to the studs and mass loss to the drywall.

Continuing down the hallway, the laundry room had two washers and one dryer that had a heat-induced color change, and the Gypsum board from the ceiling and walls had been removed and collapsed onto the floor. The exposed wood wall studs and ceiling joists had charring. (See Figure 7.)



Figure 6. The homes laundry room located on the southwest portion of the home.

The master bedroom at the end of the hallway sustained mass loss to the room's contents, and numerous ceiling joists exhibited more loss on the north portion of the room than the south side, with the north side ceiling joists collapsing into the room. The room's windows and sliding glass door were no longer intact, and the exterior wall studs sustained full-thickness charring. (See figure 8).



Figure 7. The master bedroom showed the ceiling joists that had been burned from the top down and had collapsed into the room.

The adjacent bedroom, located to the southwest of the master bedroom, experienced mass loss to the room ceiling joists, with a portion of the northern ceiling joists still hanging down and the southern ceiling joists being burned away. The room's contents sustained mass loss, indicating that the room sustained long-term burning. The partition wall separating the bedroom from the living room was primarily consumed by fire, with portions of the remaining wall having collapsed into the room.

The kitchen area had significant material consumption. Only two roof trusses remained structurally intact. All wall studs and exposed wood members displayed full-thickness charring. All the gypsum board from the room's ceiling and walls was gone. The side of the stove and the metal flashing from the room's skylight exhibited heat-induced color change and surface oxidation. (See figure 9).



Figure 8. Showing the kitchen and the mass loss sustained to the roof joists and wall studs.

The front living room, located on the southeast part of the structure, sustained mass loss to the items inside the structure, with the southwest exterior wall still having some support studs standing, but all windows were no longer present. The beam on the southwest exterior wall had a saddle burn, indicating burning from the top down during the fire. (See figure 10).



Figure 9. The home's main living room located at southeast portion of the home.

Interview #1:

Name: Jennifer Davey

Interview Date: 3/31/2025

Notes: The following is a summary of a non-recorded, non-custodial interview with Jennifer Davey, which was conducted at the scene. Jennifer Davey was aware she could stop the interview at any time and did not have to answer any questions.

Starting my interview, I asked Jennifer a series of questions regarding her background and her home. Jennifer is a commercial lines underwriter for an insurance company. She stated that she had never had a fire before and that the house was built in 1971 and was renovated in 2015. She bought the home in February of 2021 and is the only person on the mortgage. Jennifer stated that no renovations had been made since the home's purchase and that if the microwave and fireplace are both running from time to time, the breaker will trip since they are both on the same circuit. When asked about the home's bills and taxes, Jennifer said that she is up to date on the mortgage, utilities, and property taxes, and that one claim had to be made due to some ice damming that occurred in 2023. I then asked Jennifer if she knew anyone who might want to set fire to her home, and she stated that she is not aware of having any enemies. Jennifer also stated that typically her neighborhood is very quiet with very little traffic. I asked Jennifer if she was a smoker, and she stated that she was and had quit two weeks ago.

On the day of the fire, Jennifer stated that she woke up at approximately 8:45 am, logged onto her work computer, and made pasta salad for her husband's lunch. After that, she went to her laptop and worked until approximately 1:30 pm, then went out on her front porch and looked to see if she had any partial cigarettes left in the trash can that she could smoke because she had just got done with a frustrating work meeting. Jennifer was able to find a cigarette (Marlboro 100 Reds) to have, when she finished at approximately 1:45, she threw that cigarette in a plastic trash can in the corner of the porch that contained miscellaneous trash items. Jennifer then went back into the house and started working again. She stated that approximately 30-45 minutes after she was back inside, her dog started barking continuously while working and wouldn't stop. She then went to check and see what the dog was barking at, discovered flames that were completely covering the front porch, and called 911.

This concludes my interview with Jennifer Davey.

Interview #2:	
Name:	Zack Schell
Interview Date:	3/31/2025
Notes: The following is a summary of a non-recorded, non-custodial interview with Zack Schell, which was conducted at the scene. Zack Schell was aware he could stop the interview at any time and did not have to answer any questions.	
Zack Schell a neighbor from across the street from Jennifer Davey. He stated that he was in his basement on the phone and heard a loud bang. He then came upstairs and saw flames coming out of the front window. When he went outside, he heard a hissing noise like "air escaping." At that time, Zack called 911.	
This concludes my interview with Zack Schell.	

Interview #3:	
Name:	Firefighter Scott Sommers
Interview Date:	3/31/2025
Notes: The following is a summary of a non-recorded, non-custodial interview with Scott Sommers, which was conducted at the scene. Scott Sommers was aware he could stop the interview at any time and did not have to answer any questions.	
Scott Sommers stated that when they arrived on the scene, the east & west sides were fully involved, with all windows broken out. The northwest corner was still intact. The south side toward the front had a blown-out sliding glass door.	
This concludes my interview with Scott Sommers.	

Video:
No video was available for the State Fire Marshal's Office to review as part of the fire investigation.

Weather Reviewed:					
The weather information was obtained from www.wunderground.com . The data was reviewed for March 31 st , 2025. The closest reporting station was the Bismarck Municipal Airport Station, approximately 11.9 miles away. The following information was learned. After reviewing it was determined that the weather conditions may have contributed to the start and spread of the fire.					
Time	Temperature	Wind	Wind Speed	Wind Gust	Condition
12:52 pm	34°	S	10 mph	0 mph	Fair
1:52 pm	37°	ESE	12 mph	20 mph	Fair
2:52 pm	39°	SSE	13 mph	0 mph	Cloudy
3:52 pm	38°	S	13 mph	0 mph	Cloudy
4:52 pm	39°	SSE	14 mph	0 mph	Cloudy
5:52 pm	39°	SSE	13 mph	0 mph	Cloudy



North Dakota State Fire Marshals Office (ND)
 INCIDENT ORIGIN & CAUSE NARRATIVE
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Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-0030

BATS ID: i-1573061

Investigation Title: Bismarck Davey fire

Times:		
Hard Time Description	Time	Soft Time Description
	8:45 AM	Jennifer Davies Woke up
	8:50 AM	Logged onto her computer for work
	9:00 Am	Made some pasta salad for her husband
	9:30 am-1:30pm	Jennifer was working from home.
	1:35 pm	Went outside on the front porch and had a cigarette
	1:30 pm	Went back to work inside
	2:00 pm	Discovered the fire and called 911
The Fire Department was dispatched	2:06 pm	
Fire department on scene	2:26 pm	
	3:41 pm	The State Fire Marshal is contacted
	4:22 pm	The State Fire Marshal arrived on the scene
	7:07 pm	The State Fire Marshal cleared the scene
Fire department cleared the scene	7:19 pm	

Evidence identified/collected/preserved:
 No evidence was identified or collected by the State Fire Marshal's Office.

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

Other Forms/Documents/Reports Reviewed:

Bismarck Rural Fire Fighters Run Log.
 This Log Identified:

- Call Time.
- Arrival Time.
- Extinguish time
- Firefighter's time of departure from the scene.

NFPA 921
 Sections

- 6.2.2.3 Pyrolysis
 - Charring process on wood when it is exposed to elevated heat.
- 6.2.8.1 Gypsum Board Observations.
 - Color change
 - Pyrolysis
 - Clean Burn

A real estate website called Capital Real Estate Partners.
 This website had:

- Pre-fire pictures

Fire Safer Cigarette Report for Marlboro Red Label 100's Box

- Pack tested

- Length of the cigarette
- Circumference of the cigarette.
- Flavor
- Filter style
- Test Date
- Test results
- Whether the cigarette passed or failed

Kirk's Fire Investigation.

--4.6.1 Cigarettes

- Cigarette burning temps during smoking.
- The heat release rate of the average cigarette is 5W.
- Information that in the right environment, a cigarette can light toilet tissue, cardboard, paper towels, and paper.

Area of Origin:

Based on witness statements, fire dynamics, and fire patterns, the area of origin was determined to be on the northeast front porch of the home facing the street.

- Fire Effects
 - The roof trusses and wall studs located on the east portion of the structure were consumed, while those on the north side remained intact and retained more structural integrity.
 - Flashover indications were observed throughout the home.
 - The front porch located on the northeast portion of the home was consumed.
- Fire Dynamics
 - The bedroom directly to the north of the front porch sustained mass loss.
 - Charring was observed throughout on the homes wood construction.
 - More structure was standing on the west side of the home than the east side.
- Witness Statements
 - The neighbor across the street saw flames coming from the front of the home.
 - The homes owner stated that she had had a cigarette on the front porch prior to discovering the fire.
 - The homes owner stated that when she discovered the fire it was on the front porch area.

Cause Hypothesis Development and Testing:

Based on the data collected at the time of the investigation, the area of origin, the following hypotheses were developed and tested:

1. A person or persons unknown approached the exterior of the structure and utilized an open flame source to ignite ordinary combustible materials such as paper, plastic, wood, and leaves.
 - Jennifer Davey was at the residence at the time of the fire.
 - No enemies were reported by the homeowner, Jennifer Davey.
 - The area of origin was inside a fence with limited access.
 - The home is located in an area that is not a main thoroughfare.
 - The owner's dog does not typically bark.
 - This hypothesis can be eliminated as the potential cause of the fire.
2. An improperly discarded cigarette with sufficient heat came in contact with combustible material
 - Jennifer Davey admitted to going outside and having a cigarette on the front porch.

- Jennifer stated that when she finished with the cigarette, she threw it in the plastic trash container on the porch.
- Jennifer stated that her dog started to bark 30-45 minutes after she had come back inside after having a cigarette.
- Jennifer stated that when she came out to see what the dog was barking at, she saw fire coming out of the front of the home near the porch.
- At the time of the fire, winds were sustained coming from the south towards the front porch.
- Zack Schell, the neighbor, indicated he saw a fire at the front of the home when he discovered it.
- This hypothesis cannot be eliminated.

Final Hypothesis/Conclusion:

Based on the data collected at the time of the investigation, the area of origin was located on the northeast front porch of the home.

Based on an examination of the fire scene, fire patterns, witness statements, and interviews, the cause of the fire was the ignition of ordinary combustible materials, such as paper or plastic, inside a trash can by a discarded cigarette.

The fire was 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