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Pair settles over faulty fuses blaze

Local disabled man, son lost home to fire

February 04, 2010

By **Chris Conrad**
Mail Tribune

A disabled Medford man and his teenage son are back on solid financial ground after being compensated for the loss of their belongings in a fire that was caused by improper fuses.

The pair agreed to a settlement of \$8,100 after Medford Fire Department investigators determined the blaze that destroyed their rented home on West 11th Street last October was related to installation of the wrong fuses in an electrical box.

Howard Boyd, 55, was asleep when his son alerted him to a fire that had broken out in his bedroom. Boyd, who uses bottled oxygen because of a blood disease and is disabled from a high-diving accident, attempted to fight the fire before he was nearly overcome with smoke and forced to retreat.

The father and son watched the house burn to the ground.

"We lost everything we had, but it could have been worse," Boyd said.

Medford fire investigator John Patterson determined the blaze was caused by incorrect fuses in an electrical box. The box was designed for maximum 15-amp fuses, but at the time of the fire Patterson observed 20- and 30-amp fuses were in place, according to a report he filed for the Medford Fire Department.

In the report, Patterson said the larger fuses allowed a baseboard heater to malfunction. Aluminum heat fins melted, and molten aluminum may have dropped on the carpet, igniting the fire.

Boyd said he had reported previous electrical problems to Allcities Property Management of Medford, which managed the rental unit.

"Either (Allcities) or someone they sent came out and replaced fuses in the electric box sometime in the spring before the fire," Boyd said.

After the fire, Boyd was living in a hotel room paid by the American Red Cross. Only when a friend advised him to seek help from a local advocacy group did he realize he might collect compensation for his belongings.

"The friend actually saw a person come to the house to replace the fuses," said Larry Kahn, the executive director for Help Now! Advocacy Center, based in Medford.

In an interview with Help Now! volunteers, the friend said she told the man who was replacing the fuses that they were a different color from the ones previously in place.

"She said she was just a lay person, but she was concerned that using incorrect fuses is dangerous," Kahn said.

The man disregarded her comments and plugged in the larger fuses, Kahn said.

Help Now! volunteers attempted to speak with Allcities Property Management about the fuses, but the company proved nonresponsive, Kahn said.

"We eventually dealt directly with the property owner and were able to get the money for Mr. Boyd's belongings from the owner's insurance company," Kahn said.

Calls made to Allcities Property Management by the Mail Tribune seeking comment were not returned.

Boyd has since moved to a low-income apartment complex in Central Point. The \$8,100 he received from the property owners allowed him to purchase a car used by his son to take him to meetings and medical appointments.

"It is nice to finally get this thing settled and get on with my life," Boyd said.

Reach reporter Chris Conrad at 541-776-4471; or e-mail cconrad@mailtribune.com.

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Reader Reaction

Echo 1 Items

Admin



Kelly Rundle

In this case I think that the landlords/property managers/owners, or whoever should be more respectful and responsible of the family's that are left with nothing. At this point in the economy I do realize that it is hard to just fork out money for everyone but sometimes you need to put the shoe on the other foot and think about if you were the renter and they were the owner wouldn't you expect them to compensate you; for something that one of YOUR EMPLOYEES did wrong? Regardless that it's not entirely your fault but the person at fault is employed by you and you do ensure that they will do quality work. None the less life's treasures can never have

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