
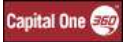


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Electrical Fire On East Side Injures Eight, One Critically

By MICHAEL WILSON
Published: October 26, 2003

Correction Appended

Eight people were injured early yesterday, one critically, when a fire caused by an electric spark swept through a Manhattan apartment where residents and their friends were sleeping, the Fire Department said.

More than 100 firefighters battled the two-alarm fire, which began in a third-floor apartment at 340 East 18th Street. It was reported just before 5:30 a.m. and brought under control at 6:11 a.m., but not before it had spread to the apartment above.

Three women and four men, injured by smoke and flames, were being treated yesterday at New York Weill Cornell Center's burn unit and Bellevue Hospital Center. Isabelle Heina, 21, remained in critical condition at the burn unit with burns to 50 percent of her body. The other six people were in stable condition.

An unidentified man was treated at the scene for smoke inhalation.

It was unclear where the people had been sleeping, although at least five had been in Apartment 3A, a three-bedroom unit where the fire began, said Joe Girodano, 22, a friend who had been out with the five earlier in the night. Most of the victims made it out of the burning apartment on their own, while firefighters rescued one of the women.

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Three men live in the third-floor apartment, fraternity brothers who graduated from New York University in May, Mr. Girodano said. They were identified as Jeffrey Edmonson, 23, Brian Mahanna, 21, and Micah Lasher, 22.

The fire was caused by a spark from a power strip in a rear bedroom, the Fire Department said, but it was unclear why the strip sparked.

"They weren't, like, doing anything stupid," said Mr. Girodano, who was with the group earlier during a night of barhopping in TriBeCa and the East Village that ended about 4 a.m.

Two women were visiting, one from Philadelphia, Melissa Blach, 22, and Ms. Heina, Mr. Girodano said.


Also injured were Ryan McCaffrey, 25, and Michelle Cruz, 23. It was unclear whether they were in the same apartment or one nearby.

Thick smoke set off several smoke detectors in the building, waking other residents, firefighters said.

"It was so scary, so scary," said a neighbor, Brett Helsham, 20. "The smell was horrible. I couldn't smell myself for a couple of hours after that. It was so smoky."

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She and other residents spilled out onto East 18th Street, shouting "Fire!" to the surrounding apartments. The apartment was destroyed in the fire, and the one above it was substantially damaged, the Fire Department said.

Ms. Blach's father, Dennis Blach, 57, rushed to New York from Philadelphia yesterday and was told by doctors that she would recover, he said. "I feel relieved that I saw my daughter and that eventually, she'll be O.K.," he said.

Correction: October 29, 2003, Wednesday An article on Sunday about an apartment fire in Manhattan that injured eight people gave a misspelled surname in various editions for a victim and for her father, who traveled from Philadelphia after hearing about the fire. They are Melissa and Dennis Bloch, not Blach or Block.

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