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## Fire safety issues addressed after latest blaze at housing complex

By CATHERINE BAUM  
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Friday, February 20, 2009

SOUTHAMPTON - Problems at a College Highway apartment complex identified by Fire Chief Stephen Hyde after a Jan. 27 fire there are being fixed.

Southampton Housing for the Elderly is under repair after a fire broke out when food was left unattended in the stove, which resulted in \$10,000 in damage.

Issues with inadequate access to the building (firefighters could only enter through the lobby) and snow-covered fire hydrants came to light after the Fire Department responded to the Jan. 27 fire.

Fire Chief Stephen Hyde alerted HAP Inc., the regional housing nonprofit that manages the College Highway complex, of necessary improvements to bring the building up to code.

"We really appreciated his suggestions," said HAP Executive Director Peter Gagliardi. "He has been very helpful to our staff in working through this."

Three apartments were affected by the blaze. The apartment in which the fire occurred still needs repair, while the other two apartments and common areas are fully restored, according to Gagliardi.

Brian M. Bliss, the 24-year-old resident whose apartment caught fire, has been relocated to a different living arrangement during his apartment's repairs. Gagliardi said HAP is waiting on final insurance approvals for those repairs.

"Cleaning up is expensive when you do it right," Gagliardi said. "You don't want the smell of smoke or walls damaged by water to go untreated."

Valley Restoration is the contractor for clean-up, Gagliardi noted.

Hyde will inspect the complex next week to make sure smoke alarms, fire drill protocols and other safety records are in proper order.

Southampton crews took out another blaze in the same apartment last year, which triggered a review of Bliss's tenancy at Southampton Meadows. Hyde found a gas-powered leaf blower in Bliss's kitchen when the fire broke out last month. He said the device is prohibited in the apartment for safety reasons, and told HAP to reinforce safety rules to tenants.

"So far the people who run the building have been cooperative," Hyde said.

Bliss's review is on going, Gagliardi said.

Other improvements Hyde ordered are clearing the areas around the building's fire hydrants of snow and granting the department a key to emergency exits besides the lobby. Plans are in place to replace emergency-exit stairs and add walkways to the exits, according to Gagliardi.

"It will make it easier on people," Gagliardi said.

Evacuation plans are posted in the building and given to tenants, Gagliardi said. Fire drills have not



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been conducted since at least last summer, when HAP took over management of the property, Gagliardi said. A meeting is being planned for Hyde to discuss and conduct drills with tenants. "It's time to be doing it again," Gagliardi said.

However, it is a challenge to conduct fire drills simply due to mobility issue with tenants, Gagliardi added.

"Fire drills in an elderly housing complex can be a mixed blessing," he said.

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