Fires displace Post Falls families

BRIAN WALKER/Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, February 23, 2016 12:00 am

POST FALLS — Two house fires within nine hours of each other displaced two families in Post Falls on Monday.

A fire destroyed a mobile home at 3:16 a.m. on Iron Horse Circle in the Arundel Mobile Home Park off McGuire Road and ripped through a bedroom where the two occupants had been sleeping.

"The flames and smell of smoke is what woke them up and the area where they were sleeping was destroyed, so they were very fortunate to get out," said Steve Isaacson, Kootenai County Fire and Rescue EMS division chief.

Isaacson said the fire likely started with an unattended wood stove in a storage shed.

Then, a fire believed to have been started when a dog knocked over a heating lamp onto straw caused significant damage to the back side of a home at 505 12th Ave. at 11:48 a.m. The fire damaged a building next door that houses a quilting business and spread to near the top of a 60-foot pine tree.

There were no injuries in either fire. Occupants of both homes have friends or relatives in the area to stay with.

During the mobile home fire, the storage shed and a third of the mobile home were leveled.

"A lot of personal items such as photos and books were lost," Isaacson said.

He said fire crews did an excellent job of preventing the fire from spreading to three other nearby homes despite running into a challenge of not having a fire hydrant in the mobile home park.

"Firefighters had to be aggressive enough with the water to prevent the fire from spreading, but not overly aggressive and run out (of the initial water supply)," Isaacson said, adding that a hydrant from a neighboring housing area had to be used to fight the fire.

Isaacson did not immediately know the names of the homeowners, who were described as a male and female in their late 30s or early 40s. He said the male told firefighters that he had a fire in the wood stove on Sunday night and that he generally lets the fires go out on their own rather than applying water.

During the fire on 12th Avenue, the back porch was destroyed and there was significant damage in the attic and on the back side of the home.

Homeowner Nick Baxa said no one was home when the fire started.

"One of the dogs must have knocked the heating lamp over," he said.

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CONTINUED — Baxa said, despite the significant structural damage to the home and the destruction of his storage shed, he's thankful that there were no injuries and the three dogs are OK. He said the family has a lot of support during the difficult time.

"We've gotten plenty of requests of places to stay," he said. "Our home group (through Real Life Ministries) has been lighting up our phones."

Baxa said the home is insured.

Baxa's neighbor who owns the quilting business was also not home when the fire started. The blaze caused significant damage to the side of that structure, which is located behind a home.

KCFR Chief Warren Merritt said petroleum products intensified the fire.

Both fires were reported by neighbors.

Isaacson said fire crews could see flames and smoke while responding to both fires, so second alarms were requested. Northern Lakes, Hauser Fire and Coeur d'Alene Fire assisted KCFR.

Residents are encouraged to have smoke detectors in their homes and check them regularly to make sure they are working, Isaacson said.