

Title of Investigation:  
Arthur Capper SR Apartments Fire SE WDC

Investigation Number:  
768015-18-0045

Report Number:  
6

U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

Statement of Certified Fire Investigator

To: Resident Agent in Charge, Falls Church I (Arson)

From: Senior Special Agent / CFI Brian Vaughn

Type of Exam: ORIGIN and CAUSE REPORT

Date of Incident: September 19, 2018



Date of Scene Examination: September 19-October 31, 2018

**SUMMARY:**

The District of Columbia Fire Department responded to a working fire inside of a four-story apartment building located at 900 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE Washington, DC. Firefighters located fire in the attic area on the west side of the building. The building was evacuated and firefighters went into defensive operations, fighting the fire with the use of truck companies on all sides of the building. The building was a total loss. The fire originated in the cockloft area above the kitchen for Apartment 431. The first fuel and an exact ignition source could not be identified. The fire has been classified as UNDETERMINED.

**BACKGROUND:**

1. On September 19, 2018, at approximately 1521 hours, the DC Fire Department responded to the building located at 900 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE Washington, DC, the Arthur Capper Senior Public Housing Apartment Building to the reports of a fire. The building is a four-level apartment building housing 162 units. Upon arrival, firefighters located fire in the cockloft space along the roof of the West side of the structure. Fire soon vented

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through the roof. Fire units evacuated the building and went into defensive operations, putting water on the roof of the structure using five truck companies located on all sides of the property.

2. Due to structural damage with the building post-fire, complete access to the building was denied to the investigators by the DC Fire Chief Gregory Dean, the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and engineer Alan Kilsheimer, who claimed he had been put in charge of the scene by the Mayor of the District of Columbia Muriel Bowser.
3. The information contained in this report consists of facts discovered by the investigators and information shared with and by insurance investigators, covered by the Federal Arson Immunity Laws of the United States. Based on information currently known to investigators, this event originated in the cockloft space above Apartment 431 of the location. No exact cause of the fire could be determined. This event is classified as UNDETERMINED.

#### **RESPONDING FIRE UNITS:**

- Engine 25, 27, 2, 5, 23, 14, 21, 18, 13, 10, 6, 19, 3, 32, 30, 26, 4, 24, 17, 28, 1, 20, 12, 8, 7
- Truck 8, 5, 14, 7, 10, 13, 15, 16, 2, 12, 6, 4, 9, 11
- Rescue Squad 3, 1
- Air 2
- Ambulance 23, 13, 62, 66, 28, 1, 20
- EMS 2, 3, 6
- Medic 2, 25
- Hazmat 1
- Rehab
- Battalion Chief 2, 3, 1, 5
- Battalion Chief for Special Operations
- Deputy Fire Chief for Operations

#### **PARTICIPATING FIRE INVESTIGATORS:**

- Brian Vaughn – ATF Special Agent, CFI – Falls Church I
- Tomi Rucker – ATF TFO – DC Fire Investigation Unit
- Chris Somers - DC Fire Investigation Unit
- Mike Pavero – ATF TFO – Detective Metropolitan Police Department
- Kenniss Weeks – ATF TFO – Detective Metropolitan Police Department

#### **SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION:**

4. This report relates to an origin and cause determination of the fire that damaged the property located at 900 5<sup>th</sup> Street SW Washington, DC. The Scientific Method was utilized during the course of this fire investigation, as recommended by the 2017 edition of NFPA 921 Guide for Fire & Explosion Investigations, which defines the Scientific Method as:

*“The systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and definition of a problem; the collection of data through observation and experimentation; analysis of the data; the formulation, evaluation and testing of a hypothesis; and, when possible, the selection of a final hypothesis.”*

- Specifically, investigators gathered available information (*data*) related to the fire event; and based on that data, investigators attempted to develop and test all reasonable theories as to where and how the fire could have started. When all reasonable theories had been vetted against known data, a conclusion was drawn.

#### WITNESS STATEMENTS:

- stated the sprinkler system for the building had been inspected within the last year and was in working order. There was no sprinkler system in the attic space for this building.
- The building is “100% electrical.” There is no natural gas inside the structure. The building is four floors of apartments with an attic level on the outer rim of the building and a flat roof section on the inner rim. The attic space was approximately 4’ high. The space was unfinished with insulation on the floor and electrical wiring energizing AC compressors on the roof and the apartments below. Service drops from this attic space would run down through the walls to the units below. Each unit of the building had its own electrical panel.
- The building utilized wood trusses and wood studs with drywall. The emergency staircases in the building were made of concrete.
- The building had one laundry room for each floor of the building and these were on the southeast corner of the building.
- The building consisted of 155 one-bedroom apartments and seven (7) two-bedroom apartments, for a total of 162 units. The building is for individuals 65 and older. Residents enter the building with a key fob and all residents are to be registered with the complex and on the lease. stated that some people sneak in and stay in the building with family or friends.
- The roof and attic areas are accessed through the staircase on the 5<sup>th</sup> Street side of the building. and four others have a key to access this roof area. did state that the door to the roof could be “jimmied” open with a flat-head screwdriver and he suspects people had done this before.
- stated the doors/hatches into attic space from the roof were easy to open. The screws holding them shut required a ¼ turn and would open. said once inside the attic space you could pull the door shut behind you. On several occasions, the access doors would fall open and the maintenance staff would have difficulty keeping them shut.
- said the maintenance staff rarely entered the attic space. said that he had looked into the space but had not walked through to see if anyone was “squatting” in the attic.
- said his staff would have no reason to be on the roof around midnight as stated by resident said no one from his staff should have been on the roof at midnight overnight Monday into Tuesday prior to the fire.

15. and three other maintenance workers with access to the roof smoke cigarettes. No one was smoking on the roof the day of the fire. did say they have smoked on the roof in the past but are careful to extinguish their cigarettes and bring the butts off the roof with them. has also found residents of the building sneaking into the roof floor of the emergency stairs to smoke cigarettes and that it was common to locate cigarette butts on the landing for the roof.
16. On the day of this event, were working on the AC unit for apartment 221. This AC unit was on the opposite side of the structure as the area of origin. On this day, the two were changing out the Freon to the AC unit. They were the only two working on the roof on the day of the fire event. had left the roof to do other work about an hour before the fire ignited. was driving a golf cart from the basement of the building up to the corner of K/5<sup>th</sup> Streets when he was alerted by of the smoke coming from the roof. described the smoke as black. ran into the building alerting residents of the fire. He also pulled all of the fire alarm pull stations inside the emergency stairs on the 5<sup>th</sup> Street side. No alarm ever sounded.
17. investigators the panel for the alarm system was in the basement near the maintenance offices. At times in the past, he had pushed the "silence" button on the panel when alarms from the panel would sound. said he had not pushed the silence button recently.
18. said he was unaware if the alarm system had been disabled.
19. stated the garden hose located on the roof was utilized to clean the coils on the air conditioning units. added water was always running to the hose and was turned off with a spring-loaded nozzle at the working end of the hose. stated the hose was curled up on the North side of the building the last time he saw it.
20. stated the day of the event he was vacuuming out an AC unit on the roof to replace the Freon. stated he had left the roof prior to the fire event and was in apartment 121 checking on the air conditioning in that unit when he was alerted to the fire. exited the building and witnessed thick black smoke coming from the roof on the 5<sup>th</sup> Street side of the building.
21. told investigators he has been in the attic space in the past. described it as a "crawl space with lots of wiring".
22. is a smoker but did not smoke a cigarette on the roof the day of this event. stated he had just two cigarettes the entire day.
23. stated that he has pushed the silence button on the fire alarm system several time in the past, the last time on Tuesday September 18<sup>th</sup>, the day before this fire event. The panel would sound an alarm and to stop it, hit the silence button. was unaware of how the fire alarm system worked beyond how to silence it.

24. [redacted] was on the fourth floor of the building working in the laundry room, when he heard people yelling about a fire. The laundry room was on the East end of the building overlooking the soccer field of the Marine barracks. [redacted] exited the laundry room and alerted residents on the fourth floor of the fire. [redacted] then went to the third floor utilizing the stairs on the SE corner of the building. [redacted] exited onto the third floor balcony that had a straight across view of the emergency stairs on the 5<sup>th</sup> Street side of the building. [redacted] witnessed smoke and fire on and above the staircase. The fire smelled like burning tar. [redacted] witnessed a firefighter get dropped on the roof of the building with a ladder truck and walk over to the staircase to assess the situation at which point [redacted] began exiting the building, alerting residents as he went.
25. [redacted] did not hear the fire alarm alert at any time. [redacted] stated there was no building security between 9 AM and 5 PM during the week.
26. [redacted] were traveling together in a vehicle on K Street heading toward 5<sup>th</sup> Street. Their workdays were ending and were heading home. The two spotted black smoke coming from the roof of the building and alerted [redacted] who was driving behind them in a golf cart. Neither had been on the roof the day of the event.
27. [redacted] of Apartment 431 of the Arthur Capper Senior Apartments at the time of the September 19, 2018 fire. [redacted] has been [redacted] Apartment 431 for the past four (4) years. Prior to that, [redacted] in Apartment 109 of the same location, but moved to the top floor apartment due to maintenance issues with 109. [redacted] did not have any major issues with the apartment itself. The air conditioning maintained the temperature, the lights worked, she never had to reset a tripped circuit breaker in her electrical panel, and her appliances have always worked. The only complaints she had about the apartment was that her AC unit would sometimes make a “straining humming-like noise” and the electric receptacle in the kitchen for her toaster would “pop” requiring her to press the reset button of the receptacle.
28. [redacted] stated she would hear people on the roof at all times of the day and night. [redacted] stated she had contacted the building management to complain about people on the roof and was informed it was maintenance staff. [redacted] stated she would often hear people overnight on the roof and was quite sure it was not maintenance staff. [redacted] would also smell smoke coming from the roof through the ventilation fan for her apartment. [redacted] stated it did not smell like cigarettes and was more like a narcotic. She would smell this smoking more at night than during the day. [redacted] last smelled the smoke and heard people on the roof around midnight on September 17, approximately 1 ½ days prior to the fire.
29. On the day of the fire, [redacted] was laying in her bed when she was contacted by [redacted]. The [redacted] had seen on the news that the building was on fire and informed [redacted]. [redacted] went to the hallway of the building where a firefighter told her to shelter inside her apartment. A minute or two later, water began pouring into her apartment through the ceiling of her bathroom from fire

suppression operations outside. then exited her apartment into the hallway and went to the stairs near the laundry room (CD corner of the building) where she was assisted to the outside.

**DCFD Firefighter Steve Shipp, Truck 7**

30. FF Ship was the first firefighter on the roof the day of this event. FF Ship is familiar with the building from periodic inspections. FF Ship got to the roof via the ladder of Truck 7 and entered the roof area from the 5<sup>th</sup> Street/West Side of the building. FF Ship walked over the pitched roof and then walked much of the West side of the building. FF Ship did not see any fire on the flat section of the roof. FF Ship initially saw some fire and smoke emitting from the area around the West side stairs. FF Ship looked into one of the hatches into the cockloft and reported that the West side cockloft was fully involved. FF Ship said fire “blew out” the hatch North of the West side stairs. FF Ship then found a garden hose coming from the Northwest corner of the roof. The water was on and the hose had a nozzle attached to it. FF Ship assumed someone had been trying to extinguish the fire prior to the DCFD arrival. FF Ship attempted to utilize the garden hose but the fire was too big. FF Ship reported also seeing what appeared to be a propane tank venting in the area of the West side staircase. FF Ship exited the roof after approximately 20 minutes utilizing the ladder for Truck 10 on the South side of the building.

**BUILDING CONSTRUCTION:**

31. The building at 900 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE Washington, DC was a 162-unit apartment building for seniors. The units were on four floors and the building occupied an entire city block. The building was bordered by 5<sup>th</sup> Street to the West (Side A), Virginia Avenue SE to the North (Side B), a Navy/Marine property to the East (Side C), and K Street SE to the South (Side D).



Overhead of 900 5<sup>th</sup> Street SE WDC

32. The building's even numbered apartments lined the outer rim of the building and had windows overlooking the exterior of the building. The building's odd number apartments lined the inner rim of the building and had windows overlooking the interior courtyard.
33. The building was of lightweight construction with a brick veneer on the exterior of the building and vinyl siding on the interior courtyard. The walls on the interior of the building were wood studded with drywall. The outer rim of the building had a pitched roof covering approximately two thirds of the roof. This pitched area housed electrical wiring and other utilities that serviced the building and its apartments. Draft stopping was present in this area every two units per code. The draft stopping had doors that allowed access through each draft stop. This pitched roof was accessed through half doors from the inner flat section. The inner roof was flat and housed the air conditioning compressors. The roof held one AC compressor per apartment. This flat roof section was accessed by a staircase on Side A. This staircase also had access to each floor of the building. The doors in this staircase were locked, with five or six individuals from the maintenance staff having keys for the doors.



Undamaged Roof Section on “BC” Corner

34. The building had a roof deck on the third floor of Side C that was accessed from both the North and South sides of the deck. Each floor had a laundry room near the “CD” of the building.
35. The basement for the building consisted of a parking garage for approximately 30 vehicles, space for the maintenance crew, and space for much of the building utilities, including the fire suppression system and fire alarm system.
36. The fire suppression system for the structure provided fire suppression for each of the four floors of apartments. The system did not provide fire suppression in the cockloft of the roofline and was not required to per DC Code. The most recent inspection of the system occurred on December 29, 2017 and was conducted by Castle Sprinkler and Alarm, Inc. Documents from that inspection revealed the system to be in good order with only minor issues for mislabeling a portion of the system. This sprinkler system appears to have functioned properly during this event.
37. The fire alarm system for the building was an Edward Systems Technology Model EST-2 that was installed in 2006 when this structure was built. The system was manufactured in 2000. This system’s most recent inspection also occurred on December 29, 2017 and was conducted by Castle Sprinkler and Alarm, Inc. Documents from the inspection revealed the system to consist of 17 manual pull stations, 22 Smoke Detectors, 89 Horn/Strobes, and 7 strobes. The inspection revealed the system to have a number of deficiencies and listed the following:
1. Five (5) Strobes flashes but horns don’t work on 4<sup>th</sup> Floor
  2. Three (3) Strobes flashes but horns don’t work on 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor
  3. One (1) Strobe flashes but horn does not work basement
  4. Display Screen on operating panel inoperable
  5. Recommendation to have the system monitored offsite
38. It is unclear from the documents provided to the investigators, what, if any of the deficiencies were addressed, but there is no evidence that this system was being monitored at the time of this fire event. There is also no



evidence that an alarm sounded or a strobe illuminated during this event despite the investigators confirming that multiple pull station alarms had been pulled.

## FIRE SCENE EXAMINATION:

39. The fire scene was documented over approximately two months due to concerns over the structural integrity of the building. Use of heavy equipment, including a crane was utilized to put investigators into the area of origin of the fire.

### Exterior

40. Side A – Side A was the most damaged side of the exterior. The roof on this side had collapsed into the interior of the structure and a portion of the exterior wall above the building's main entrance was listing toward the exterior requiring its removal. The windows on the fourth floor had been broken out during suppression operations. There was no observable fire damage on this side with the exception of some smoke deposits along the roofline.



Side A

41. Side B – No observable fire damage existed on this side of the building. There were no smoke deposits on this side of the building. The damage that did exist was in the roof with large sections of it collapsed to the interior and on a down spot that separate from the building when a portion of the roof collapsed.



Side B

42. Side C – The damage on this side of the building was on the roof, with some collapse near the “CD” corner. There was no damage observed below the roofline.



Side C

43. Side D – Large sections of the roof collapsed on this side causing the gutters to separate from the building in certain areas. The windows on the fourth floor had been broken out during suppression operations. Some smoke deposits were observed above some of these windows. The windows below the fourth floor were intact.



Side D

44. Roof – Three quarters of the roof had either been consumed in the fire or collapsed into the interior of the structure. The roof in the “BC” corner was the only section that was intact. Investigators observed the damage from the bucket of a Navy Fire Department Tower Truck. The fire damage observed was in the roof area only. The wood studs of the apartments below was largely undamaged by fire. This is consistent with the fire originating above the apartments.



Roof



Fire Damage above the Roof Line & No Fire Damage Below

45. Courtyard – The interior courtyard had no fire damage below the fourth floor. Where fire damage was observed, it was caused by burn through from sections of the roof collapsing and burning through the courtyard wall. Very little of the vinyl siding was damaged by heat or fire during this event which is consistent with the vast majority of the fire remaining in the roof above the roofline. Most of the damage that was observed in the courtyard was from collapse. A portion of the wall in the “CD” corner of the courtyard failed when the interior of the building collapsed into the first floor in this area.



Some Burn Through “AB” Corner



Damage from Collapse “CD” Corner

46. The damage observed on the exterior of the structure is consistent with a fire originating in the roof area and spreading across the roof. No significant fire damage was observed below the roofline.

#### Interior

47. Basement – There was a large quantity of water in the basement from fire suppression activities above. This water damaged several vehicles and some equipment within the basement. There was no evidence of any fire damage in the basement.



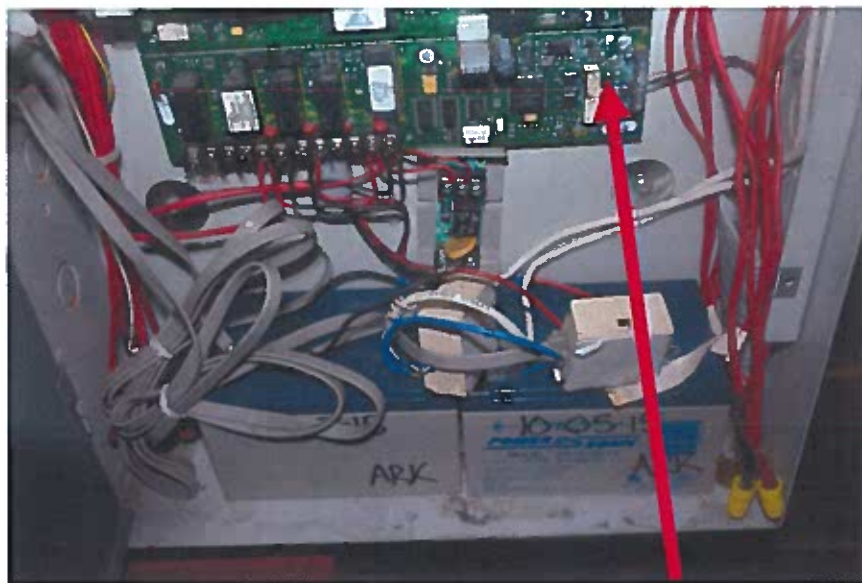
Water in the Basement

48. The fire alarm system was located in the basement. On the panel, the light labeled “Disable” was illuminated and the system was energized as of Thursday September 19, 2018. On that date, it was decided by the DCFD to leave the panel in place in order for it to be examined by representatives and forensic experts from the insurance industry. When investigators returned to the basement on September 23, the panel was no longer energized.



Alarm Panel with Disable Light Illuminated

49. The inside of the panel revealed there was damage to a circuit of the panel. It was unclear whether this damage was caused by this event or pre-existed the fire event.



Blown Out Circuit inside the Fire Alarm Panel

50. First Floor – This floor sustained no direct fire damage from this event. There was a significant amount of water on the floors and three areas of collapse along the inner rim of the building. These areas of collapse were along Side A, Side B and in the “CD” corner. In each area of collapse, investigators identified roofing material and portions of each of the floors above.



Water Damage on the First Floor



First Floor Collapse

51. On September 20, 2018, the first floor was the only floor in which investigators were able to walk through each corridor, with the exception of the “CD” corner where it was unsafe to do so.
52. The lack of any direct fire damage is consistent with the fire not originating on the first floor.
53. Second Floor – The second floor damage was similar to that of the first with three areas of collapse and a large quantity of water on the floor. On September 20, 2018, investigators’ attempt to conduct a walk-through of this floor was unsuccessful due to concerns of further collapse and the softening of the hallway floors from the large amount of water on them.



Collapse and Water Damage on the Second Floor

54. The lack of any direct fire damage is consistent with the fire not originating on the second floor.

55. Third Floor – There was no direct fire damage on the third floor. The amount of water on the floor from fire suppression activities above was substantial. Investigators' attempts to walk this floor were unsuccessful and unsafe due to the excessive softening of the floors.
56. Collapse was present on this floor as well. Investigators were able to photograph inside Apartment 331, which sat directly below Apartment 431.



Collapse Down Through Apartment 331

57. The neighboring Apartment 329 had some minor collapsing but significantly less than that of Apartment 331.



Collapse Down in Apartment 329



58. The lack of any direct fire damage is consistent with the fire not originating on the third floor. The collapse down through Apartment 331 was the most damaged area of the floor and consistent with witness observations that the fire originated in the cockloft directly above this area. It should be noted that the collapse was caused by the large amount of water put into the building at this point rather than the collapse being caused by the fire itself.
59. Fourth Floor – The fourth floor was damaged to the point that investigators could not make entry into the floor at all from the emergency staircase of Side A, as the risk of further collapse was too great. The direct fire damage observed was all above this floor. The lumber and wall covering of this floor were undamaged by fire. The damage to the lumber for the cockloft was badly charred and much of the asphalt roof covering this cockloft was consumed during the event. The most damage area of the cockloft was above Apartment 431.



Damage above Apartment 431

60. Firefighters stated that they believed they observed propane tanks on fire in this area of the building. Investigators uncovered no evidence of a propane tank in this area. A number of similar looking tanks used to hold Freon for air conditioning units were located. There is no evidence that a propane tank was involved in the ignition of this event.



Freon Tanks Damaged by Fire

61. The damage observed on the fourth floor is consistent with a fire originating inside the cockloft above Apartment 431.
62. Attic Level – The damage to the Attic Level along Side A of the building was significant. The area around the emergency staircase had burned and collapsed to the fourth floor. The lumber for the cockloft was significantly charred and the roofing material was largely consumed. The roofing material on the inner flat section was in considerably better condition than the roof of the cockloft. This is consistent with the fire originating in the cockloft rather than on the flat section of roof.



Damage to the Cockloft vs. Damage to the Flat Section

63. In the weeks after the fire, investigators, utilizing a crane were lowered into this area of the building and identified the area of origin as inside the cockloft directly above the kitchen for Apartment 431. Investigators

with the use of the crane removed Air Conditioning Compressors, electrical wiring, examined a bathroom ceiling fan, and light fixtures. These items were functioning as designed and did not cause this fire.



Area of Origin in the Cockloft above the Kitchen for Apartment 431

64. First arriving firefighters reported a garden hose pulled near where the fire originated. Investigators located a green garden hose extended toward the area of origin. The hose appears to have been pulled back towards its source as portions of the building collapsed. This is evidence that an unknown individual attempted to extinguish the fire in its early stages.



Garden Hose Pulled Towards Area of Origin

#### **EVIDENCE COLECTED:**

65. **Photographs:** The location was photographed by Special Agent Brian Vaughn, Investigator Chris Somers of the DCFD Fire Investigation Unit, and a number of investigators from the insurance industry.
66. The EST-2 Fire alarm panel was removed for testing by insurance investigators. Due to the delay in removing the panel from the building as ordered by the DCFD Fire Marshal's Office, the panel was no longer energized when it was removed. Forensic investigators from Fire Safety Consultants, Inc. examined the fire panel and determined that when the panel lost energy, its data was lost. A computer backup has not been identified at the time of this writing. There is also no evidence that this panel was monitored off site.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS:**

67. On September 20, 2018, Engineers from the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs conducted an initial building assessment and fire investigators completed a walk-through of a portion of the building deemed safe. It was clear that the building's condition would not allow for a thorough search of the building to confirm that all residents and other potential occupants were no longer inside the structure. Although investigators were told that all residents of the building had been accounted for by the building's management, investigators remained concerned about the potential of some residents or occupants being inside the building.

68. On September 21, 2018, at 0800 hours, the DC Arson Task Force assembled a team of Cadaver and Search and Rescue dogs to conduct a search of the building. The Fire Chief Gregory Dean, in consultation with engineer Alan Kilsheimer, denied the canine teams access to search the building.
69. On September 24, 2018, resident \_\_\_\_\_ was recovered from Apartment 218. Following the recovery the canine teams were granted access to the building and their searches were negative for occupants.
70. It should also be noted, that despite investigators being denied access into the building, the investigators observed the owner of the building being allowed access on multiple occasions during the first six days following the fire event.

**FIRE PROGRESSION TO OTHER STRUCTURES:**

71. There was no known damage to neighboring structures.

**NUMBER OF FATALITIES AND/OR INJURIES:**

72. There were no fatalities from this event. A number of individuals were transported to local hospitals with minor injuries.

**ESTIMATED VALUE OF LOSS:**

73. The estimated damage is approximately \$50,000,000 to the building and contents.

**WEATHER:**

74. On September 19, 2018, the following weather data was reported for Washington, DC.

Temperature: 85 degrees F  
Humidity: 72%  
Wind: 11 MPH to the South

75. Weather was not a factor in this event.

**HYPOTHESIS AREA OF ORIGIN, FIRST FUELS IGNITED & IGNITION SOURCES:**

76. The area of origin of this fire is inside the cockloft directly above the kitchen for unit 431. Utilities for the building in that area have been examined. These include the electrical wiring, air conditioning units and its wiring, a bathroom exhaust fan, and wiring for various light fixtures for Apartment 431. Examination of these items revealed that they were in working order and did not cause this event.
77. The investigators considered the possibility of a cooking event in the kitchen of Apartment 431. Investigators ruled this out for three reasons. One, the occupant of Apartment 431 \_\_\_\_\_ told investigators she had not been cooking at the time of the event and was in her bed when she was notified by concerned family about the fire event. Two, there were no burn patterns observed inside the kitchen of Apartment 431. In fact, the burning was above the apartment and above the fourth floor. What fire damage there was on the fourth floor of the

building was caused by drop down from fire above. Three, if a cooking fire had ignited inside of the kitchen, the fire suppression system for the building and the apartment would have controlled the fire.

78. Investigators considered the possibility of maintenance staff, several of whom are known smokers, to have been smoking on the roof of the building when the fire ignited. Through separate interviews of the staff, investigators are sufficiently convinced that this did not happen for two reasons. One, separate interviews revealed the entire staff was off the roof for approximately one hour when they were alerted to the fire. Two, the fire ignited from inside the cockloft and not on the flat section on which the maintenance staff had been working earlier in the day. In fact, these interviews also revealed that none of the maintenance staff had been inside the cockloft in recent months.
79. Interviews conducted with residents and maintenance staff revealed to investigators that there had been issues in the past with outside individuals gaining access into the building and "squatting" in different areas of the building. Maintenance staff have also revealed that although five or six individuals had key access to the roof, access could also be obtained with the use of simple tools such as a flat head screwdriver. The cockloft of the building could be accessed through panels from the flat section of the roof. A simple ¼ turn of screws on these access panels could open them up. Maintenance reported that on multiple occasions they found these access panels loose or open.
80. The surveillance equipment for the building was not operable at the time of this event. Investigators located no working cameras that would have assisted in identifying who was coming and going from the building. Maintenance staff and residents also told investigators that there was minimal security at the front door of the building during the day, with people gaining access to the building whether they lived there or not.
81. Apartment 431 told investigators that [redacted] had heard on several occasions footsteps above unit at all hours of the night. [redacted] told investigators [redacted] had heard people above [redacted] unit in the middle of the night, approximately 36 hours prior to this fire event. [redacted] also stated [redacted] would smell strange odors coming from the roof when she had a window open or through a vent, including the smell of marijuana and other suspected narcotics. The area [redacted] heard these footsteps and the area from which [redacted] smelled this smoke is in close proximity to where this fire event originated.
82. Investigators also located a garden hose used by maintenance to clean the air conditioning units on the roof. This garden hose was running and pulled as close to the area of origin as it would reach. This is clear evidence that there was some attempt by an unknown individual to fight the fire in its early stages.
83. Although the investigators could not identify an ignition source and the first fuel ignited from this event due to the large amount of damage and collapse in the area of origin, investigators believe the most likely cause of this fire was some form of human activity in the cockloft of the building above the kitchen for Apartment 431.

## CONCLUSION:

84. Based upon the fire scene examination and a review of witness statements, photographs and documents provided by the other investigators, it is the opinion of the fire investigators that the fire originated in the cockloft above the kitchen for Apartment 431. A first fuel and an ignition source in that area could not be identified due to the excessive damage and collapse.
85. Therefore, based on the information currently available to the investigators, the fire has been classified as **UNDETERMINED.**

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**Tech Review:**  
MPD Detective Michael Pavero, IAAI-CFI