

# Man dies in fire, smoke alarm had no batteries

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A working smoke alarm could have saved the life of an elderly man killed in a fire Monday morning. Roland Fields Bare, 82, died around 3:30 a.m. when a fire broke out in his apartment at 309 D Street in North Wilkesboro. Bare was dead at the scene when members of the North Wilkesboro Fire Department arrived. North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby said that Bare appears to have died from smoke inhalation. Although there was a smoke detector in the upstairs apartment where Bare and his son, Ronnie, lived, there were no batteries in the device, Hamby said. During a Monday morning interview with *The Record*, Hamby said that, had the smoke alarm been working, "It could have possibly given them enough time to get out." Ronnie Bare received burns from the fire and was treated in the Emergency Room at Wilkes Regional Medical Center, Hamby said, adding, "He's going to be OK." Hamby said an electric heater is the suspected cause of the fire. He said that the Bares had apparently been heating the apartment with three such heaters. The one that is believed to have started the blaze had been placed near a vinyl covered, cushioned chair, Hamby said. "We found a small electric heater sitting near the chair," Hamby said. "We determined that the heater ignited the chair and that's where the fire occurred." Ronnie Bare, 45, made the emergency call at 3:41 a.m., when he discovered a fire had started in the apartment. Hamby said that the younger Bare was awakened by his father's shouts.

"He heard his father hollering for him and woke up and tried to get to him," Hamby said. Although Ronnie Bare tried to get to his father, he was blocked by the flames and smoke, Hamby said. When firefighters arrived, the chair and carpet were on fire in the kitchen/living room area of the apartment, Hamby said, adding that black smoke from the burning vinyl and chair cushion filled the apartment. Roland Bare was found on the floor in his bedroom. "It looked like he had gotten out of bed and was trying to get to a window," Hamby said. Wilkes Coroner Howard Laney agreed that it appears that the elderly man died from smoke inhalation. Although the man's body was burned in places, Laney said those injuries wouldn't have been severe enough to be deadly. Smoke inhalation is a quick killer, Laney said. "It cuts off your oxygen and smothers you. Two or three breaths are about all you can take," he said. An autopsy will be performed on Roland Bare, Laney said, adding that the procedure is routine for fire victims. Although there are four apartments in the green-painted house, damage was contained to the Bares' residence, Hamby said. "The other apartments really didn't receive any damage," he said. "We used very little water."

Roger Wright owns the building, Hamby added. With the apartment being damaged by fire and smoke, Ronnie Bare will likely live with family members for now, the chief added. He also stressed the importance of making sure smoke alarms are functional. "We tell people they need to keep good batteries in smoke detectors. Sometimes people take the batteries out of them to use in something else," Hamby said, "But, it's a good idea when the time changes twice a year to change the batteries in your smoke detector. They're just something you have to maintain." As

for using portable heaters — both electric and kerosene, Hamby said, “These need to be used in an area where they have two to three feet of clearance from anything else. With kerosene heaters especially, you need to make sure they are on some kind of metal base. Radiant heat can get hot enough where it can ignite, furniture, clothing or bedding.”