

# House Guttled By Fire That Started From Children Playing With Lighter

A two-bedroom wooden frame home at the end of Herndon Street in North Wilkesboro was gutted by a fire that started from children playing with a cigarette lighter late Sunday afternoon, said North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby.

After arriving at the Gary and Nancy Mathis home a little after 4 p.m. Sunday, said Hamby, North Wilkesboro firefighters broke out a front window to ventilate thick brown smoke for enough visibility to battle the fire.

He said the thick smoke largely was from a mattress that caught fire in the bedroom where the children were playing with a lighter.

Mathis said in an interview that the grandchildren told him they were playing with the cigarette lighter when bed sheets caught fire from a piece of paper that was lit.

He said he was watching TV and Mrs. Mathis was asleep when their smoke alarm went off and saw smoke coming from the bedroom where their grandchildren, ages 4, 8 and 9, were playing.

Mathis awakened his wife and found the grandchildren in the room trying to extinguish the fire.

Mathis said he burned his hands trying to put the fire out. Wilkes Emergency Medical Service bandaged his hands at the scene and he remained there. No one else was hurt.

Hamby said the fire burned the bedroom where it started, into the attic and through the roof, directly above the bedroom. He said most of the rest of house received heat and smoke damage.

Mathis said he has insurance on the house.

North Wilkesboro firefighters saved Mathis' pickup from an adjoining enclosed garage after using a chainsaw to cut open a wooden garage door because the door wouldn't open.

Hamby said the Knotville Fire Department arrived with two fire trucks and a cascade unit for refilling firefighter air tanks after North Wilkesboro firefighters had the blaze under control.

Gary and Nancy Mathis were sitting in the front of the pickup as firefighters used a large fan to help remove remaining smoke from the house after the blaze was extinguished.

Herndon Street is off Gordon Street, near Finley Park.