

Inspector says child with lighter caused fire

By Michelle Starr
Staff writer

A child playing with a lighter ignited a pile of clothes and caused a fatal fire early Monday morning, Lincoln Fire Inspector Jack Bruns said.

The 1:46 a.m. fire at 831 G St., Apt. 4, claimed the life of 8-year-old Laura Stewart on Monday and sent her 3-year-old brother, Kenneth Devante, to the hospital.

Devante remains at Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center, and his condition was reported as stable as of Tuesday evening.

Bruns said Stewart, who was found by firefighters sitting in the bathroom sink, had been playing with a lighter that caused the fire.

Stewart was found in respiratory arrest, later revived and sent to Children's Hospital in Omaha where she died Monday afternoon, said Deputy Fire Chief Rick Furasek.

Bruns said the sink she was found in was running, and he speculated that Stewart was trying to put out the fire with water until the heat got too intense.

She probably sought refuge from the fire in the sink, he said.

"From (the view of) a little child you understand water cools heat,"

"Unfortunately, when you're dealing with fire, you don't always have total control."

Jack Bruns
Lincoln Fire Inspector

Bruns said. "I'm thinking that she was thinking the water would cool the fire."

Furasek said two teen-agers, Laurie Redcherries, 15, and an unidentified 13-year-old, also fled the apartment.

About five other people in the building were rescued; some of the people were pulled from the buildings' windows, Furasek said.

Bruns said both parents — whose names were unavailable — left the apartment for a friend's house around midnight and were not present during the fire.

According to the teen-agers' testimony, they were asleep, and the parents did not inform them they were leaving, Bruns said.

Initially one of the parents' testimony agreed with the teen-agers' claim, but the parent later recanted the statement, Bruns said.

Lincoln Fire Department Deputy

Chief Dean Staberg, who oversaw the efforts at the fire, said the actual fire was relatively small.

The amount of smoke generated by the fire was more threatening than the flames, Staberg said.

Furasek said the fire caused a total of \$35,000 in damages to the building's structure and its contents.

The fire caused heavy smoke and heat damage throughout the building, Furasek said.

Bruns said children play with matches and lighters despite fire safety education.

"Unfortunately, their curiosity takes over, and they end up playing with them and they think they can handle it," Bruns said.

"Unfortunately, when you're dealing with fire, you don't always have total control."

LEGISLATURE

Senator hopes bill cuts down on drivers' using cell phones

By Veronica Daehn
Staff writer

Nebraska residents should be careful when using cell phones in their cars, a Nebraska senator said.

But so far no law mandates that caution.

If Lincoln Sen. David Landis' bill, LB993, passes, drivers would be urged to reconsider using a cell phone while driving.

The bill would not ban cell phone use, but it would hold drivers partially accountable for an accident if they had been talking on a cell phone when the accident happened.

Members of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee heard testimony on the bill Feb. 16, but the bill is still in committee.

Landis' legislative aide Laurel Marsh said the senators have not had time to meet and discuss it.

Marsh said the testimony at the committee hearing was fairly balanced, with four or five people testifying in favor of the bill and another

four or five opposed.

Darrel Jensen, director of the Nebraska Safety Center, testified in support of the bill.

"One of the most dangerous things in driving is the failure of people to keep their mind on the task of driving," Jensen said. "It's inevitable that we all do that, but it's important to bring the focus back to driving."

Talking on a cell phone makes it more difficult to focus on driving, he said.

"I have a real concern for highway traffic deaths," Jensen said. "The use of cell phones is a contributing factor to many of those."

Marsh said cell phones are important for several safety reasons, so Landis does not want to ban them completely from vehicles.

The bill might encourage more people to pull over and stop driving while making a call or to stay in their driveways to talk before leaving, she said.

Marsh said research showed that other distractions while driving are often beneficial to the driver.

Things like flipping the radio dial, drinking a cup of coffee or talking to a passenger help keep the driver alert, she said.

But talking on a cell phone has been equated to driving while intoxicated, because the driver is not focused on driving.

The driver is, instead, focused on the phone conversation.

Marsh said there was a definite level of concern for the issue.

"People asked very good questions (at the hearing)," she said. "This bill strongly encourages drivers not to use a cell phone while moving."

Other states, including Nebraska, have proposed bills that would completely ban cell phones in cars, Marsh said.

But no state has introduced a bill like this one that would hold drivers accountable if accidents occurred while they were using cell phones.

Jensen said it is up to each driver to be responsible on the road.

"People should use judgment as to when to use a cell phone and when to just drive," he said.

Researchers analyze use of steel in bridges

By John Hejkal
Staff writer

The U.S. steel industry is facing a highly competitive world market. New high-tech methods of using steel make it possible for the industry to keep up.

And University of Nebraska-Lincoln research has helped make those high-tech methods available.

Atorod Azizinamini, a professor of civil engineering, is working on research to open up the use of a new type of steel for building bridges.

The new steel, known as high-performance steel, or HPS, is stronger than conventional steel, Azizinamini said.

HPS has a low-carbon content, so it can be welded with little or no preheating. This may make it possible to weld HPS on site, he said.

These improvements over conventional steel make research in the area of HPS highly important, he said. One reason for the research is to bring federal building codes up to date.

In a joint project begun in 1994, the Navy, the Federal Highway Association and American Iron and Steel Institute worked on developing a new form of steel.

The project developed a product that would help the U.S. steel industry become more competitive in the world market. The result was HPS.

"After the HPS was developed, the problem was to apply this to the field," Azizinamini said.

With the advent of HPS in 1996, old building conventions needed to be modified, Azizinamini said. Changes in the design and shape of bridges were needed for effective use of HPS, he said.

Azizinamini is the director of the National Bridge Research Organization, NaBRO, which was founded in June 1998 to do specific research in bridge development.

"We are in the forefront of these materials because we got involved from the very beginning," he said.

Majid Sarraf, an assistant professor of civil engineering, was hired this month to work with Azizinamini on the projects.

"We are conducting full-scale and scale-model tests of components of bridges to ensure that the proposed techniques will work in practice," Sarraf said.

Federal building regulations were meant for conventional steel, Azizinamini said, so research has to be done to see how HPS will perform in the field.

The testing at UNL has been instrumental in revising the code, eliminating most limitations on

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Atorod Azizinamini
civil engineering professor

HPS, he said.

Through NaBRO, the bridge research has obtained national and international recognition, Azizinamini said.

Researchers from Japan and South Korea have come to Lincoln in the past year to consult with Azizinamini on how bridges are built in the United States.

"These relationships sometimes develop into future research activities," he said.

The recognition has been beneficial to students, as well, Azizinamini said.

"We have graduate students at several firms because of the research we are doing," he said. "Designers across the country are calling us to see when our graduate students are going to be graduating so they can hire them."

The research on HPS has affected Nebraskans directly because the first two major bridges made with the new steel are projects of the Nebraska Department of Roads, Azizinamini said.

"If they had used conventional steel, the bridges would have been 20 percent heavier," he said.

The lighter weight means less steel needs to be bought to make the bridges, which translates into money saved for taxpayers, he said.

Sarraf came from the University of Ottawa in Ontario, Canada, to help with the research. He said it was on the cutting edge and was varied in its scope.

"I was quite impressed with the number of projects and the innovative ideas," Sarraf said.

A new shape for bridges, called inverted steel box sections, is in the process of being patented through UNL.

Azizinamini said today's research may have an impact on future bridge design.

"The shape of the bridges you'll see five to 10 years from now may look different from bridges you see today."

ASUN

Supporting benefits focus of vote

■ Bill challenges NU to treat same-sex partners the same as married couples.

By Sara Salkeld
Staff writer

Tonight, the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska will be discussing a bill that would support the university's giving benefits to same-sex couples.

Same-sex couples would be given the same advantages as legally married couples, such as health insurance.

The bill states that 62 percent of the top 50 universities provide such benefits.

The bill also says the University

Health Center does not offer a student policy with a domestic partners option.

Arts and Sciences Sen. Natalie Hoover, who will be presenting the bill, said the bill challenges the university's adherence to its non-discrimination policy.

"The students and faculty who are not allotted domestic partner benefits feel they are being discriminated against," Hoover said.

The bill also raises the concern of losing or deterring faculty, staff or students from UNL because of the lack of benefits.

College of Journalism and Mass Communications Sen. Beth Lee, chairwoman of ASUN's Academic Committee, said retaining faculty would be a reason for her to support this bill.

"I want to wait to hear the proposal of the bill and hear what those who are in favor and opposed to the bill have to say," Lee said.

Like Lee, Graduate Sen. Vicki Geiser does not yet know how she will vote.

"I need to get more information," Geiser said.

In other business, ASUN will choose the migration game for the fall football schedule.

ASUN has chosen Notre Dame because it was added to the NU football schedule for the first time since the 1920s.

President Andy Schuerman will present the choice to the senators for a vote.

The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. in the Nebraska East Union; the room will be posted.

Study Abroad

Semester at Sea
AustraLearn
Lexia Intl
Semester in Nepal

Information Session
Thursday, Feb. 24
11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
Pewter Room, NE Union



- ◆ Meet program representatives on campus
- ◆ Postsession slide presentation on Semester in Nepal at 2:30 p.m., Pewter Room