

1687 North Houghton Court

24 January 2010 Response

**DEKALB COUNTY FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT
INCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

**BY: David Foster, Fire Chief
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27 January 2010

INCIDENT NARRATIVE

This incident occurred on January 24, 2010 at 1687 Houghton Court North, Dunwoody Georgia. The house is a 3,124 square foot, four bedrooms, two stories, wood frame home with a two car attached garage. The house is built over a 1,240 square foot basement. The master bedroom is located on the main floor. Parcel ID number 18 374 03 039. The home was owned and occupied solely by Ann Bartlett.

This property is located within DeKalb County Fire Rescue Department Station 12's response territory. Fire Station 12 is located at 5323 Roberts Drive, Dunwoody Georgia, approximately 2.4 miles travel distance to Houghton Court North. The next adjacent Fire Station is Station 18, located at 4588 Barclay Drive, Chamblee GA. Station 18 is approximately 2.77 miles travel distance from Houghton Court North.

At 01:03:43 hrs, Ann Bartlett, utilizing her cordless telephone, called DeKalb County 911 Center reporting she had set her house on fire with the "thing for my nose". Ms Bartlett provided the address at 1687 Houghton Court, Dunwoody. The DeKalb 911 call taker told Ms Bartlett to evacuate the house. Ms Bartlett appeared to misunderstand this direction as Ms. Bartlett repeated, "house yes". The line then disconnected.

The standard DeKalb County Fire Rescue unit dispatch Protocol for a dwelling fire is three engines, one truck, one rescue ambulance and two battalion Chiefs. The DeKalb 911 Center voice dispatched Engine 12, Engine 18, Quint 21 (as an engine), Truck 18, Rescue 21, Battalion

1 and Battalion 2 to a dwelling fire at 1687 North Houghton Court, at 01:06:13. All units acknowledged the dispatch. Quint 21 advised over the radio they were out of service due to a mechanical problem and requested another unit be dispatched in their place. However, crews were able to start Quint 21 and they proceeded to the fire before another unit was dispatched.

While enroute to the call, the 911 dispatcher advised all responding units, the Automatic Location Identification (ALI) database identified the location as 1687 Houghton Court North.

Engine 18, arrived on Houghton Court North at 01:15:10. Engine 18's acting officer; Fire Apparatus Operator (FAO) W. Greene reported no visible signs of smoke or fire. Greene did not establish command as required by DeKalb County Departmental Guidelines, Chapter 4 – Incident Management Section 102.000. Establishing Command.

The first unit to arrive at the scene of an incident shall establish command and remain in command until relieved by a ranking officer or until the incident is terminated. The incident commander shall utilize the Fire Rescue Incident Management Worksheet to manage resources and tactics.

FAO Greene, stated when he arrived on Houghton Court North, they drove slowly around the cul-de-sac, looking for addresses and for signs of smoke or fire. Greene reported no crewmember from Engine 18 exited the engine onto Houghton Court North. Greene reported, Engine 18, stayed on the street for just a few minutes and reported, via radio, to Battalion 1 he could find no fire and began looking for a dwelling fire on other streets. No personnel from Engine 18 walked up the driveway of 1687 Houghton Court North. Officers on Houghton Court North reported they could not see a house with a mailbox with the house numbers "1687". Greene said he saw a mailbox with a house number 1686, the house located next door had a mailbox with no address, the next house had a mailbox with the address 1691.

Truck 18 arrived on Houghton Court approximately 45 seconds after Engine 18. This time is as reported by the officer on Truck 18, Captain Motes. Personnel on Truck 18 failed to acknowledge their arrival by pushing the "on scene" button on the Mobile Data Terminal. Captain Motes also did not establish incident command. Captain Motes stated he too did not see the address or any signs of smoke or fire. He reported he did look up at the house, 1687 Houghton Court North, but the house was dark. Captain Motes reported, he and his firefighter exited Truck 18 only to spot the truck as it backed up to turn around to leave the cul-de-sac. No personnel from Truck 18 walked up the driveway of 1687 Houghton Court North.

Engine 12 arrived on Houghton Court North at 01:15:21 hrs. Captain Sell Caldwell commanded Engine 12. Upon his arrival, Captain Caldwell advised over the radio his truck was staging at the fire hydrant. The fire hydrant was on the corner of Houghton Court North and Vernon Lake Drive. During his interview, Captain Caldwell, stated he did not hear anyone take command of the incident, and Engine 12 was parked on Houghton Court North facing Engine 18 and Truck 18. When Engine 18 and Truck 18 left Houghton Court North, Captain Caldwell stated he directed Engine 12 to enter into the cul-de-sac to turn around. Captain Caldwell stated he too did not see signs of smoke or fire. No personnel from Engine 12 walked up the driveway of 1687 Houghton Court North. Regarding Level 1 staging Departmental Guideline, Incident Management, Section 107.001 Level 1 states:

If staged companies observe critical tactical needs, they will advise Command of such critical conditions and their actions.

Captain Caldwell also did not establish incident command.

During this incident, there was radio traffic between Engine 18, Truck 18 and Battalion 1. Battalion 1 was responding from Fire Station 15 located at Peachtree DeKalb Airport. Battalion 1 was staffed by Battalion Chief Lesley Clark. During Battalion Chief Clark's interview, he acknowledged he heard no units establish command on Houghton Court North. Before he left Station 15, Chief Clark stated he entered 1687 Houghton Court into the GPS device in his truck and was given directions to that address. Departmental Guidelines, Incident Management, Section 103.000, Command Options state:

Chief officers should eliminate all unnecessary radio traffic while responding unless such communications are required to insure that command functions are initiated and completed. This requires the person initially in command to give a clear on-the-scene report and continue to give updated progress reports as needed.

Battalion Chief Clark did not insure Incident Command was initiated.

After the initial dispatch, the Fire Rescue Department System Status Manager Michelle Swanson, contacted Battalion Chief Bennie Paige and advised him, she felt that this was going to be a valid house fire. Paige was acting as the shift commander. Paige advised he had received the call from Swanson and had heard some of the radio traffic regarding the dwelling fire, but did not pay much attention to the call because he was working on Kronos.

Upon leaving Houghton Court North, Fire Rescue units fanned out into the neighborhood looking for a dwelling fire. No fire was found. Battalion 1 put all responding units available at 01:22:32.

At 06:18:38 hrs, Fire Rescue units were again dispatched to a dwelling fire. The fire was found to be at 1687 Houghton Court North.

FINDINGS

1. Voice dispatch of Fire Rescue units took 2 minutes 30 seconds.
2. Appropriate Fire Rescue units were dispatched.
3. Fire Rescue units were aware by voice dispatch and information on the computers within the trucks, the address of the call was 1687 North Houghton Court.
4. The first Fire Rescue unit on scene was Engine 18; a Fire Apparatus Operator was commanding Engine 18.
5. FAO Greene failed to establish incident command as required by Departmental Guidelines.
6. FAO Greene successfully completed Incident Command Simulator training on December 29, 2009.
7. The second Fire Rescue unit on scene was Truck 18, commanded by Captain Motes. Captain Motes also failed to establish Incident Command.
8. Captain Motes successfully completed incident command simulator training on December 30, 2009.
9. The third Fire Rescue unit on scene was Engine 12, commanded by Captain Caldwell. Captain Caldwell failed to establish Incident Command, because he believed the first unit on scene should have established command and he was not paying close attention to the radio traffic.
10. There was no address visible for 1687 Houghton Court North from the street.

11. Houses on either side of 1687 Houghton Court North had visible addresses, and although not in exact sequence (1691 and 1686), should have provided a clue of the location of 1687 Houghton Court North.
12. No Fire Rescue personnel walked up the driveway of 1687 Houghton Court North to verify the address.
13. Battalion 1 never arrived to Houghton Court North.
14. Battalion 1's GPS confirmed 1687 Houghton Court North was a good location.
15. Battalion 1 did not insure an incident commander was established at this incident.
16. Although alerted about something unusual about this call, acting shift commander Paige took no action to insure a proper response was completed.
17. DeKalb County Fire Rescue Department guidelines are in place which:
 - a. Adopt the National Incident Management System to provide a systematic approach for the Incident Commander to manage all types of disastrous incidents.
 - b. Fixes responsibility for the command function and its associated duties on one individual. The effective functioning of Department Units, personnel and outside agencies at operating incidents requires clear decisive action on the part of the Incident Commander.
 - c. Creates a practical framework for incident operations and effectively manages the efforts of all resources deployed and available.
 - d. The first unit to arrive at the scene of an incident shall establish command and remain in command until relieved by a ranking officer or until the incident is terminated.

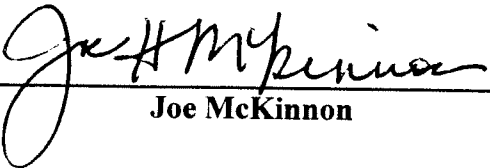
The information in this report is, to the best of our knowledge, complete and accurate.



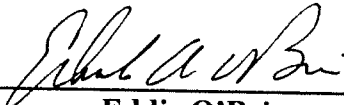
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