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Alderman, 8th District

## **MFD brownouts diminish Milwaukee's fire safety**

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan  
October 22, 2015**

There is no way of knowing for sure, but the tragic death of a two-year-old Milwaukee girl who was pulled from a burning house early Tuesday might have been prevented if we'd use a different approach to Fire Department staffing.

The girl and three other children were in a dwelling that became engulfed in fire early Tuesday on N. 36<sup>th</sup> St. near W. Silver Spring Dr. A brownout of MFD Engine Co. 37 – located very nearby at N. Teutonia and W. Custer – sadly caused a two- to three-minute delay before a crew arrived. The ladder company that was first on the scene did not have water to pour on the fire (ladder rigs are not equipped with a supply of water), and firefighters put their lives on the line getting into the home (to search for people trapped) under very dangerous circumstances.

The term “brownout” refers to eliminating a shift of a ladder company or engine company from a fire house that houses more than one company. The cost-saving practice, I believe, has consequences as seconds count in any structure fire where people – in many cases children – are trapped.

When I asked former Fire Chief William Wentlandt (during a meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee) about 10 years ago whether brownouts and MFD cuts jeopardized public safety, he said “yes.” His courage and candor on the subject likely cost him his job, as he was not reappointed by the Barrett Administration.

I still believe that we are playing Russian roulette with the safety of our citizens by employing brownouts.

The question for me is simple: **Why are we taking risks (with brownouts) with the public safety of our city – risks that we most certainly wouldn't take with the safety of our own families?**