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Milwaukee Christmas Morning Fire Spotlights Critical Fire Safety Transparency Issue

Early this morning, Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) crews responded to a residential fire in the 60th and Cold Spring area that caused serious property damage and threatened the safety of residents just hours after Christmas Day celebrations. MFD reports that residents were lucky—multiple interior and ladder rescues and no serious injuries.

Preliminary information and long-standing patterns show that the affected building, like many older multi-family structures across our city, does not contain an automatic sprinkler system. This safety feature can dramatically decrease fire severity and loss of life. Fire safety experts nationwide have repeatedly emphasized that sprinkler systems are one of the most effective life-saving measures in residential fire emergencies.

This 1967 building predates 1973 sprinkler requirements and is legally exempt from having equipment installed. This state statute exemption, and the lack of transparent notification to tenants about it, was a central concern that the Milwaukee Common Council acted to address a few weeks ago.

Unanimous Council Action to Improve Transparency

On November 25, 2025, the Common Council passed a landmark fire-safety disclosure ordinance (file #250302) that now requires landlords of residential buildings with three or more units to provide tenants with clear, standardized information about key fire-safety features before they sign a lease. This ordinance closes a decades-old transparency gap that left renters unaware of critical safety limitations in their homes. The disclosure must also include the most recent fire inspection date and any applicable temporary occupancy permits. Larger buildings and those operating under exemptions are required to undergo semi-annual safety inspections — strengthening ongoing oversight.

Alderman Burgelis Statement

“Today, thanks to the fast firefighter response, no one was seriously injured. A fire like this on Christmas morning is a stark reminder that fire safety is strong public policy because it could be a matter of life and death,” said **Alderman Peter Burgelis**, author of the fire-safety disclosure ordinance. “For too long, tenants have been in the dark about whether their home has essential protections like sprinklers.”

“While today’s fire investigation continues, this incident reinforces why transparent fire-safety information and proactive building safety measures are more critical than ever. The city’s new ordinance took effect on December 16, 2025, ensuring landlords must comply with disclosure requirements moving forward.”