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NORTH FULTON COUNTY NEWS 5:40 p.m. Wednesday, April 20, 2011

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Investigation into cause of Sandy Springs apartment fire delayed

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By Kristi E. Swartz

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

It may not be until early next week before investigators learn exactly what caused an apartment building in Sandy Springs to burn to the ground.

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Curtis Compton, ccompton@ajc.com

A distraught resident watched the fire at the Winding River Village Apartments in Sandy Springs on Tuesday, April 19, 2011.

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Curtis Compton, ccompton@ajc.com

Paramedics tend Sandy Springs Capt. Tony Brown after a fire at the Winding River Village Apartments caused the structure to collapse on Brown and other firefighters.

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The two-story building's roof collapsed in Tuesday's blaze. Authorities are waiting on a piece of heavy equipment to arrive so they can move the debris and continue their investigation.

"We're working on it now, but we just got a little bit of a curveball," Sandy Springs fire marshal Jeff Scarbrough said Wednesday.

About 10 families were displaced by the fire at the Winding River Village apartments.

The Red Cross and area Community Action Center were at the apartment complex Wednesday trying to help those who needed food, clothes and a place to stay, Scarbrough said.

Two firefighters and two civilians were taken to North Fulton Hospital to be treated for smoke inhalation. They are expected to be all right, according to Sandy Springs Police Lt. Steve Rose.

Scarbrough said he has a confirmed list of 11 displaced residents but said they may be more.

Rescue workers were blasting at least four heavy streams of water on the two-story building from the top, right, left and back in efforts to put out the heavy fire. Residents of that building and others gathered in an area outside of the parking lot, some of them on their cell phones, crying.

Cheryl Tubbs, a resident of the burned building, said she had just started a new job two weeks ago after being out of work for two years. Tubbs said she lost everything in the fire.

"I've been laid off for two years. I just got a job, just got a job, now everything is lost," Tubbs said. "So I have to start off from scratch again."

The fire began at about 12:30 p.m., Scarbrough said. Firefighters arrived to find a mother and three small children in the parking lot. They were in the apartment unit that caught fire, he said.

Crews went to the first and closet fire hydrant, which did not have water, Scarbrough said.



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Scarborough said the lack of water slowed their efforts, but crews already were hooking up hoses to other hydrants nearby.

"We're looking into what the issue was with the hydrant," Scarborough said.

The fire moved into the attic within 10 minutes, causing part of the roof to collapse, Scarborough said. Crews then had to stop

and come out of the building to account for each of the firefighters before they could begin working again, Scarborough said.

The fire broke out in Building 295 at the complex, located near River North Parkway and Roswell Road, just south of the Chattahoochee River.

"This lady came and banged on the door and told me that the building was on fire and to get out of here," said Gail Burns, who lived on the top floor apartment with her daughter and grandchildren.

The woman who knocked on Burns' door passed out once they got outside, she said.

"The ambulance came and got her," Burns said.

The thick smoke could be seen from Roswell Road, said Yamesha Carr, who drove over to the complex to see if her friends were safe.

"As we pulled up in front of the building, the far right side was pouring out thick, black smoke," she said. "Before you knew it, the whole building was engulfed in flames. And the next thing you knew, the front of the building just fell and collapsed."

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