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Landlord Cited For 30 Violations After Fire

by *Heather Brown*

St. Paul (WCCO) — The landlord of a St. Paul apartment complex where a fire injured seven people was cited on Tuesday with 30 code violations, including six violations that could warrant criminal charges.

Josey Perez's apartment was where seven family members suffered from burns and smoke inhalation after a couch started on fire on Monday.

As of Tuesday evening, two mothers and three toddlers are in critical condition and fighting for their lives in area hospitals. Two other five-year-olds are in satisfactory condition due to smoke inhalation.

According to authorities, they were all living in a 250 square foot apartment. Steve Zaccard, the St. Paul Fire Marshal, said an agent for the Perez told him the space had been rented to five people.

Among the issues found, there were unapproved locks on the bedroom doors, no second exit from the third floor, an unapproved fire alarm system, overcrowding, and the smoke detectors were not working in the bedrooms.

Zaccard said 23-year-old Julia Salgado may have been burned so badly because the couch was too close to the apartment's only exit.

"It was congested. There were seven people living where there was only space enough for two. They had furniture for seven. They had mattresses on the floor for seven people," Zaccard said.

Neighbors said the rent was near \$500 a month. The families moved in about three months ago.

Perez did not return phone calls today from WCCO-TV seeking comment.

Zaccard said the apartment was supposed to be inspected in June 2, but Perez never showed up for the appointment. He also never signed an affidavit vouching all the smoke detectors were working.

"He knows about overcrowding," said Zaccard. "He's one of the worst landlords."

Investigators haven't had the chance to talk to Salgado yet, but they'd like to know who took the batteries out of the smoke detectors and why a 5-year-old boy was playing with the lighter that started the fire.

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