



Firefighters responded within four minutes to a call from a resident at 2:39 a.m. Tuesday reporting smoke coming from an apartment at the Fairfield Courtyard on Country

IN CORAM, A NIGHTMARE

Woman, 71, dies amid falling debris as flames engulf four-unit complex

BY STEFANIE DAZIO
AND MICHAEL O'KEEFFE
stefanie.dazio@newsday.com
michael.okeeffe@newsday.com

Police officers raced around a gated apartment complex in Coram early Tuesday, frantically pounding on doors to rouse sleeping residents as a blaze devoured the homes of their neighbors and killed a 71-year-old woman who couldn't escape in time.

The neighbors grabbed their coats, wallets and pets and ran outside to see the four-unit building at the Fairfield Courtyard at Coram apartment complex on Country Club Drive already engulfed in flames that threatened to spread to other apartments.

Susan Harelick lived on the first floor, where authorities believe the fire started. The woman, who sometimes used an

oxygen tank for health reasons, had just crossed her home's threshold when tragedy struck.

"She almost made it out," Suffolk County Police Homicide Det. Lt. Kevin Beyrer said.

First responders discovered Harelick's body trapped beneath fallen debris. "She either collapsed by smoke inhalation or from fallen debris or she just couldn't make it any further," Beyrer said. "She's a small woman so it wouldn't have taken much."

The nightmare began at 2:39 a.m., when a resident was roused by "popping sounds" and saw smoke coming from Harelick's apartment. The resident called the complex's building maintenance and 911, Beyrer said, summoning Sixth Precinct officers to the scene within four minutes.

Firefighters from Coram,



Investigators survey the scene of the fire later Tuesday morning.

Selden and Gordon Heights were dousing the raging flames within 19 minutes of the first report.

Robert Gorman, 61, who lives in the building next door, said his housemate's daughter woke him up. "I fell asleep on the couch and she woke me up, 'Get up, get up, there's a fire,'" he said.

Frank Walls, who lives in a neighboring building just a few feet away with his wife, Candi, two dogs and a tarantula, said

he put their pets in his truck when they were evacuated. He saw a cat jump off a fiery overhang and run under a car. The cat, whose fur was singed and paws burned, was taken to a veterinary emergency room.

"The cops were going around, checking everybody. They checked the woods to make sure nobody was there," Walls said.

Walls and other residents said an air-conditioning unit

that had been attached to the burning building exploded, adding to the night's terror.

By 4 a.m., the fire was deemed under control — though it would reignite around four hours later, summoning firefighters back to the complex.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation by the homicide squad and arson detectives, police said, but it does not appear to be criminal. No other injuries have been reported.

Harelick is Suffolk County's third victim of a fatal fire in 2019. Two women were killed in North Patchogue earlier this month. She was pronounced dead at the scene. Her exact cause of death remains undetermined. Harelick was not hooked up to the oxygen tank when she was found.

Harelick's neighbors said she mostly kept to herself but some had shoveled out her car or brought her mail in. They surveyed the damage hours later, watching as authorities flew a

1,4-dioxane alert

Citizens group:
65 of 80 products
tested positive

BY DAVID M. SCHWARTZ
david.schwartz@newsday.com

Tests found the potentially toxic chemical 1,4-dioxane in 65 of 80 household products, including trace amounts in some baby products, shampoos, detergents and body washes, according to a report released Tuesday.

The products with the highest levels include Victoria Secret's shower gels, Tide Original laundry detergent and Dreft Stage 1/Newborn baby laundry detergent, according to the test commissioned by Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a Farmingdale-based group that is pushing a statewide ban of 1,4-dioxane in household products.

The group said the consumer products can be harmful to Long Island's groundwater, and a concern if absorbed through the skin at higher levels. Manufacturers, meanwhile, said their products are safe to use and called the report a distraction from industrial pollutants.

1,4-dioxane, designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a likely carcinogen after a lifetime of exposure to drinking water, has been found in dozens of Long Island drinking water wells. Water providers have estimated it will cost \$840 million to install treatment systems.

While 1,4-dioxane in the water is primarily associated with industrial sites, because it was used in solvents like those used to clean machine parts, the chemical is also found in household products, produced as a byproduct of the manufacturing process.

"It's a critical concern for contaminating our groundwater and drinking water," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, who added it also could be a concern for skin exposure. "We really were shocked at some of these results."

A study in July by the group found 23 of 30 products con-



Adrienne Esposito discusses tests on household products.

WHAT TESTS FOUND

Six of the 80 products tested for 1,4-dioxane had levels of 10,000 parts per billion or higher.

- **Victoria's Secret (Bombshell Fragrance Wash):** 17,000
- **Victoria's Secret (Love Fragrance Wash):** 16,000
- **Tide Original:** 14,000
- **2X Ultra Ivory Snow (Gentle Care):** 11,000
- **Gain Original:** 10,000
- **Dreft (Stage 1/Newborn):** 10,000

For the results of all products tested, go to newsday.com/environment

tained 1,4-dioxane, and the group used additional funding from the Long Island Community Foundation to test 50 more products.

Manufacturers said their products are safe to use and called the study a "distraction" from the real issue with 1,4-dioxane contamination in groundwater, which has been found at industrial sites on Long Island.

"Consumers can feel confident in the safety of their favorite and highly trusted household products," James Darr, manager of state government relations and public policy for the Household & Commercial Products Association, said in a statement. "The evidence clearly shows that they are not the source of Long Island's decadeslong water con-

tamination issues."

Brian Sansoni, spokesman for the American Cleaning Institute, reiterated that 1,4-dioxane is not deliberately added to consumer products.

"Given the extraordinarily low levels of 1,4-dioxane that might remain at trace quantities in certain materials and products, the report's misleading claims are confusing in their implication of potential risks to consumers," he said in a statement.

He said while many of the levels fall within U.S. and global guidelines for products, companies "control and minimize the presence of 1,4 dioxane in their products and raw materials and routinely take necessary steps to reduce its presence to the lowest levels possible, so consumers can continue to safely use their products."

No federal or state standard exists for the amount of 1,4-dioxane allowed in consumer products. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's website cites a European Commission report that concluded products are considered safe for consumers at 10,000 parts per billion or below. Six products tested had levels at or above 10,000 parts per billion, with the highest coming in at 17,000 parts per billion.

Lifelong exposure to 0.35 parts per billion of 1,4-dioxane in drinking water represents a 1-in-a-million cancer risk, according to the EPA. In December, a panel of state health and environmental officials, water

providers and academics recommended a drinking water standard of nearly three times that — 1 part per billion for 1,4-dioxane.

Citizens Campaign for the Environment tested products bought at Long Island stores and found the chemical in both high-end products and less-expensive alternatives, and products for men and women. Esposito said that on the positive side, many of the products marketed as environmentally friendly had no detectable levels of 1,4-dioxane.

"A lot of these green products really are green," she said.

She said the group originally tested the household products after seeing 1,4-dioxane contamination in drinking water supplies in areas without a history of industrial use, such as Montauk, Smithtown and Huntington.

The products were tested by ALS Laboratory in Rochester, New York, which is certified by the state Department of Health and can detect down to 25 parts per billion.

The products with the highest levels of 1,4-dioxane were Victoria's Secret Bombshell Body Wash, Victoria's Secret Love Body Wash, Tide Original Detergent, Ivory Snow 2X Ultra Detergent, Dreft Stage 1/Newborn Detergent, Gain Original Detergent, Tide Simply + Oxi Detergent, The Home Store Lemon Scented Dish Soap, Baby Magic Hair and Body Wash, Up & Up (Target) Free + Clear Dish Soap, Persil Original Detergent, and Pantene Pro-V Nature Fusion Shampoo.

Environmentalists and water providers are pushing to ban 1,4-dioxane from products as state health officials have said they plan to set an enforceable drinking standard for 1,4-dioxane. Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) and Assemblyman Steve Englebright (D-Setauket) have sponsored bills to ban the products.

Removing 1,4-dioxane from drinking water is costly and expensive. Only one system in New York — at a Suffolk County Water Authority well — has been approved for use in a drinking water system. There's no way for households to remove the chemical on their own, experts said.



Club Drive in Coram.

FIRE

drone over the charred wreckage and later raked up debris amid the lingering smell of smoke.

"Imagine having someone knock on your door, looking through the blinds and seeing balls of flames," recalled Colleen Herbs of Medford, who was visiting a friend in the building next door.

By noon, Cathy Garrison, 55, looked in "disbelief" with her neighbors at the gutted building. She lives in an adjacent building and was forced to load her cat, Pookee, into its carrier and grab her purse, passport and glasses before running out the door to see "a mass of flame." But her home wasn't damaged, unlike four others. She said one man had moved into his now-blackened apartment on March 1.

"This young man who had just moved in, who didn't really know this woman, he broke down in tears when he heard she'd died in it," she said.

With James Carbone and Craig Schneider

STRINGER NEWS SERVICE

HOWARD SCHNAPP