



EMS Crews Go To Wrong Address In Fatal Fire

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CityNews.ca Staff

The call came in as it always does, a matter of life and death - a 65-year-old woman trapped in an apartment fire on Monday afternoon. Firefighters and paramedics both rushed to the scene in a desperate attempt to save the victim and put out the flames.

The smoke eaters arrived at 100 Cavell Ave. just four minutes after receiving the call. But the ambulance didn't get there for almost 22 minutes. It's impossible to say for sure whether that delay proved fatal, but the victim died at the scene. But their tardiness wasn't because of traffic or mechanical troubles. Instead, they were sent to the wrong Cavell Ave.

Thanks to amalgamation, streets with the same name are everywhere in the city. In this case, there's a 100 Cavell in Toronto, where the crews originally went. But the address in question was actually a seniors' residence in Etobicoke. And now EMS has launched an investigation to determine whether that was a fatal mistake. "Dealing with duplicate street names is part of the amalgamation and something they are trained to do," points out spokesman Larry Roberts. "In this case it didn't happen. At first glance it appears we have a situation where they picked the wrong 100 Cavell."

According to the rules governing emergency call receivers, addresses must be cross-checked against intersections. It appears that didn't happen in this instance. Whatever the explanation, it does little to satisfy those affected by the loss. "If there is a mistake of this magnitude, I think it's completely ridiculous and it should never happen," complains William Booth. But the blame, if there is any, shouldn't rest solely with paramedics or their dispatchers. City Council looked at the problem during the start of amalgamation in 1997 and decided all duplicated streets should be identified by their previous borough designations, like East York or Scarborough. But they decided not to take any other action, because changing all those street names would cost millions. And many residents affected by the proposed alterations worried it would cost them a small fortune to update all their records, stationery and address labels. And there were other considerations, as well. "My son knows the name of the street, both of my sons 4 and 7," explains Rioma Khan, who lives on one of several John Sts. in the G.T.A. "So for them to change it, I'll have to teach them all over again to get used to the fact that the street is no longer John Street. The Fire Marshal's Office suggests careless smoking may be to blame in the Cavell fire and discovered there were no sprinklers in the victim's room. Whatever the cause, the effect in this case appears clear. Something went wrong and an entity famous for the saying 'seconds

can save' lost precious time in the confusion. Those who drive the rescue vehicles vow it won't happen again. And so does Mayor David Miller. "We're doing a full investigation to determine what went wrong," he promises. "The system should work the way it is now."

Think it's tough for you to get around the city? Imagine what paramedics, police and fire departments have to go through. They often receive calls from people who are long on panic and short on specifics. The following is a list of streets in the city of Toronto that have the exact same names in different places. As big as this list is, it could be even bigger - it doesn't include potentially confusing options like Ave., Dr., Circle and the like, which often share similar monikers. If you needed to get somewhere in a hurry, would you know which one of these to head to?