

7 units lost in South Lake Tahoe fire



Fire destroys seven condos in Tahoe Keys on May 3.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Old construction is one of the main reasons so many units in a Tahoe Keys condo complex were destroyed on Tuesday.

“The fire was hidden in a bunch of void spaces due to construction. Once it was in the common attic it was really hard to cut off. That is why it spread to the top of the units,” Karl Koeppen, shift commander with South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Current building codes necessitate separate attic spaces with fire blocks.

The fire on Ala Wai was reported just before 2pm May 3 by a neighbor. The fire was contained at 4:10pm, with crews on scene until 9pm.

Seven of the nine units will have to be rebuilt because of fire, water and/or smoke damage. The two end units are still being assessed as to whether they will be habitable.

A handful of people were displaced. Some were assisted by the Red Cross, while others went to stay with friends.

Only smoke was visible when crews first arrived; from the originating unit and the eaves of neighboring ones.

Two holes were sawed into the roof to create a draft to help find the fire. Simultaneously firefighters were on each of the two floors looking for it. It had been spreading through the walls for about 90 minutes before firefighters arrived.

The unit where the fire started was having work done so it could be rented.

“With a torch, I took the fitting off,” contractor John Dean told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It hit insulation. I put water on it. When I left there was no indication of flames.”

When he came back smoke was everywhere.

Because there were no injuries no criminal charges are likely to be filed. The rough damage estimate is at \$3 million.