

Lawsuit Filed In Fire Death

A lawsuit has been filed for the September 13, 2009 fire death of a Bastrop, Louisiana woman. The lawsuit claims that Ms. Merrimac Ellis burned to death after her motorized wheelchair burst into flames while she was operating it. The fire occurred at the Bond House Apartments in Bastrop, Louisiana, an apartment for elderly citizens. The fire forced the evacuation of residents of the Bond House.

“The origin of the fire was unquestionably the wheelchair,” said Travis Holley, one of the attorneys representing the family of Ms. Ellis. “And there is no question that Ms. Ellis died a horrible death as a result.” Holley and J. R. Whaley of Neblett, Beard & Arsenault are the attorneys who filed the suit on behalf of the family of Ms. Ellis.

According to the lawsuit Holley and Whaley filed, at approximately 9:00 p.m. on September 13, 2009, Ms. Ellis was in her apartment at The Bond House and could be heard by neighbors yelling, "Help, I'm on fire!" The lawsuit says that when the Bastrop Fire Department responded and entered Ms. Ellis' apartment, firefighters found Ms. Ellis trapped in her powered wheelchair, in front of her kitchen sink and that both Ms. Ellis and the powered wheelchair were engulfed in flames. The lawsuit alleges that despite repeated attempts, Ms. Ellis was unable to free herself from the burning chair and that in its subsequent investigation, the State of Louisiana Fire Marshall observed bloody fingerprints under the sink where Ms. Ellis was sitting when the fire consumed her. The lawsuit states that “These bloody fingerprints are indication of Ms. Ellis' valiant, yet unsuccessful, attempts to free herself from the burning chair to save her life.”

The lawsuit also alleges that Invacare, the world’s largest manufacturer of motorized wheelchairs, has a history of fires originating in their powered wheelchairs and details a 2000 recall Invacare ordered of over 215,000 powered wheelchairs. Ms. Ellis’ was manufactured after the recall.

“Unfortunately, Invacare is all too familiar with its chairs causing fires. Our most vulnerable citizens deserve products that will help, rather than harm, them,” Whaley said.

The lawsuit also blames the Bond House for inadequate sprinkler and alarm systems and the companies the lawsuit alleges were responsible for the maintenance of those sprinkler and audible alarm systems.

The lawsuit is entitled James Ellis, Individually and on behalf of his deceased mother, Merrimac Ellis versus Bond House Senior Apartments, LP, Philadelphia Insurance Company, Samella Anderson, Invacare Corporation, Delta Fire Protection Systems, Inc. and Vantronics Security System of Monroe, Inc. The docket number is 2010-74.

###

ABOUT-

Attorney Travis Holley
Law Offices of Travis Holley
www.travisholley.com

Attorney John Randall Whaley
Neblett, Beard & Arsenault
www.nbalawfirm.com

FOR INFO/INTERVIEWS – Contact Nicole – 318-794-0301