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St. Thomas Blaze Engulfs Buildings, Injures Firefighters; Investigation Underway

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V.I. Fire and Emergency Services responded to fires in Vester Gade 6-D and Gamble Gade No. 31, St. Thomas on Thursday, July 6 2023. By. VIFEMS

ST. THOMAS — A large fire broke out at Vester Gade 6-D and Gamble Gade No. 31 in St. Thomas during the early hours of Thursday morning, rapidly consuming the original structure and spreading to adjacent buildings, including a four-story residence, according to the V.I. Fire and Emergency Services (VIFEMS).

VIFEMS immediately responded to the alarm, deploying nine units of firefighting equipment. Additional support arrived from Hotel Company, Echo Tango, and Lima units, with a total of 27 on-duty and off-duty firefighters and personnel working tirelessly to control the situation.

During the operation, two firefighters suffered non-fatal injuries. One has since been discharged, while the other remains under care at the Schneider Regional Medical Center. "VIFEMS extends its deepest thoughts, prayers, and gratitude to the injured firefighters and their families during this challenging time," reads the release.

VIFEMS Director Daryl George described the response effort as difficult. "It was a rough fire. It started at 3:00 a.m. and we had all hands on deck. We had the fire basically under control, but it took a toll on the whole team. One firefighter passed out... and was taken to the hospital. He is currently under the care of the doctors, and we're wishing the best for him and his family," Dir. George told the Consortium during an interview.

According to the agency, approximately two and a half hours after the crews arrived on the scene, they managed to bring the fire under control. The teams spent an additional two hours conducting salvage operations and thorough inspections to ensure all potential threats were neutralized, and the area was secure.

"While this incident posed significant challenges, I commend our teams' bravery and tireless dedication during this operation. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the injured firefighters and their families during their recovery," Mr. George said in a statement to the media.

The cause of the fire has yet to be determined; however, the director said several leads were being followed, including the possibility that the structure might have been intentionally set ablaze. "We had a large group of people who were in the area, some homeless people. So we're asking some questions; we're seeking information from anybody who may know or saw anything to please contact us," Mr. George said.

VIFEMS has extended its gratitude to the EMS Unit, 911 Control Center, VIPD, St. Thomas Rescue, and WAPA for their collaborative response and support during this incident.