

Des Moines house fire started on porch, authorities say

Fire officials remain unsure of exactly what started a [fire that destroyed a house on Des Moines' west side](#) after several children inside escaped the night before.

A putrid smell hung in the air Friday evening outside 1542 30th St., near Drake University.

“The origin of the fire was near a chair on the front porch, where a young boy was right before the start of the fire,” said Brian O’Keefe, a spokesman for the Des Moines Fire Department. “But we cannot confirm what started the fire.”

The boy has not been able to shed light on Thursday night’s situation, O’Keefe said.

Tina Potthoff, a spokeswoman for MidAmerican Energy, said the electrical and gas service in the area was not to blame. An arcing utility line seen outside the house Thursday night was a consequence of the fire, not the other way around, she said. Officials did shut off gas to the house Thursday night as a precaution.

The 108-year-old residence had been rented by Jessica Swain for five years. She lived there with her five children.

“The fire developed rapidly because it spread along the vinyl siding of the house. The house became electrically charged, and water and electricity don’t mix,” O’Keefe said. “In addition, the children called Mom before they called 911, which delayed our response.”

Swain’s family was offered assistance by the Red Cross following the fire.

“Fortunately, the kids got out safely with the cat,” O’Keefe said.

Damage to the house was estimated at around \$75,000. The home’s assessed value as of last year was \$100,300, according to county records. The title is held by a Los Angeles resident.



A fire on Thursday night destroyed a house near Drake. (Lillian Schrock/The Register)



Flames engulfed the house Thursday evening. (Bill Neibergall/Register file photo)