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Woman's body found in RV fire;

Firefighter tests positive for alcohol consumption

By Jeff M. Hardison © Oct. 17, 2017 at 4:37 p.m.

LEVY COUNTY – The body of a 51-year-old Chiefland woman was recovered from the scene of a fire early Sunday morning (Oct. 15), according to records.

The body of Lisa Richard, 51, of Chiefland was found in the remains of an RV that was completely destroyed by fire, according to records.

A call to the Levy County Sheriff's Office's 9-1-1 dispatch center at 2:10 a.m. Sunday morning (Oct. 15) brought a quick response from Chiefland Fire Rescue.

CFR Engine 71 responded at 2:11 a.m. on Sunday to a fire in a recreational vehicle at 7191 N.W. 95th St., near Chiefland, according to LCSO and CFR records.

The RV was fully involved Chiefland firefighters found upon their arrival, according to records.

After the fire was extinguished, a human body was discovered in the RV, according to records.

Other agencies responding to the fire were Levy County Department of Public Safety's Rescue 7, LCDPS ALS 100, Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Engine 77, the LCSO and the Chiefland Police Department.

The LCSO is investigating the death. The Medical Examiners' Offices in Florida documents all deaths in the state, and in this instance is among the agencies helping the LCSO.

The State Fire Marshal's Office is investigating the fire.

Det. Mike Lofton is the fire investigator.

A spokeswoman at the Fire Marshal's Office in Tallahassee said the investigators of fires simply look at the cause and the origin of fires. They assist agencies such as the LCSO, she said.

FIREFIGHTERS RESPONDING

This incident included a sad twist, because a firefighter-paramedic from Fanning Springs Volunteer Fire Rescue is believed to have been under the influence of alcohol on the scene, according to records.

Fanning Springs Firefighter II-Paramedic Mark W. James, 38, Firefighter I Shaun Gibson and Fanning Springs Support Member Jennifer Poppell responded on Fanning Springs Volunteer Fire Department Engine 77.

That unit was paged at 2:15 a.m. and arrived at the scene at 2:27 a.m., and that mission was completed and the unit was back available at 4:40 a.m. on Sunday, Fanning Springs Fire Chief Roy Bass said.

Engine 71 from Chiefland Fire Rescue arrived at 2:23 a.m., according to records.

The personnel from Chiefland on that fire engine were Capt. Daniel C. "Cal" Morgan, and Firefighter-EMT John A. Lake II. CFR Firefighter Kevin Davis responded as well. Davis is also a deputy with the LCSO, according to records.

Records showed that Fanning Springs Firefighter-Paramedic James registered .22 on a breathalyzer, which was administered by Chiefland Police Department at the scene when he was showing symptoms of alcoholic intoxication.

Chief Bass told Capt. Morgan that Firefighter James resigned from the Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Department at the scene on that night immediately after this part of the events of the night.

A reading of .08 on a breathalyzer that registers alcohol content is enough to have reasonable cause to arrest a person in Florida for driving while under the influence of alcohol.

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A .22 breathalyzer reading, therefore, is more than twice .08 and almost three times that amount.

Some fire chiefs in Florida, even on volunteer departments, advise their firefighters not to respond to calls even if they have had one beer in the hour previous to being called. Firefighters who have alcohol in their bloodstream are seen by some people as not being able to perform their duties in a safe manner.

Late Tuesday afternoon (Oct. 17), Fanning Spring Fire Chief Bass responded to a question about former Firefighter-Paramedic James' choices early Sunday morning.

"He (James) was not driving any Fanning Springs' apparatus," Chief Bass said. "He responded from home to the station and rode to the scene as a passenger. This is not a reflection on Fanning Springs Fire Rescue -- as this type of behavior is not tolerated by me for any member of my service.

"Even if he (James) would not have resigned on scene at that point," Chief Bass said, "he would have been removed from my department for his actions."