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Wooden DC Apartment Complex for Seniors Up in Flames After Three-Alarm Fire

Several hospitalized following massive rescue efforts by firefighters and even the United States Marines

Silver Spring, MD – In Southeast DC, a devastating [three-alarm fire](#) ravaged a senior affordable housing complex on Wednesday, leaving residents of the [161 occupied units displaced](#) and at least four injured. The massive plumes of smoke could be seen throughout the district and have lingered long enough to produce school closings due to air quality. This is reportedly the wooden building's [third major fire](#) in the past ten years.

“They had to call in the Marines, that is how bad this has gotten, yet in city councils and state houses throughout the United States those who make money off of the promotion of combustible wooden structures are telling lawmakers that their products are perfectly safe,” said Kevin Lawlor, a spokesperson for Build With Strength, a coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association comprised of fire safety professionals, engineers, architects, community groups and industry experts committed to strengthening the nation’s building codes. “In our nation’s capital, where our laws are made, let’s hope that images of Marines, first responders, and good Samaritans rushing to save senior citizens from the very structure that was built to protect them is a catalyst for strengthening our building codes to prohibit the use of combustible materials.”

The entire complex consisted of affordable housing, with many of the seniors disabled and unable to flee on their own. [Marines were seen carrying paralyzed residents](#) out of the building, and the fire department released a video showing a firefighter carrying a resident down a ladder leaning against the side of the apartment building. Video from the scene showed people rushing toward the building with wheelchairs to rescue residents inside. [Local schools and businesses](#) have closed following the fire.

Compounding the danger was a brick façade, masking the weak wooden structural make-up of the building. “A passerby, reporter, first responder, or even a tenant wouldn’t know that the structure and frame of the building was actually something more akin to firewood than brick until, as it did in this situation, a spark becomes a devastating fire that endangers the lives of an at-risk population, puts people on the street, and diverts the fire, police and medical resources of an entire city toward an entirely preventable event,” continued Lawlor.

This blaze comes on the heels of a disturbing trend of fires in the Washington, DC area. Just earlier this week, Prince George’s County, Maryland saw a [devastating three-alarm fire](#) that led to 132 displaced

people and \$2.2 million worth of damages. On a single day this May, two fires struck Prince George's County and Fairfax County, Virginia, with the latter also striking a senior housing development.

Build with Strength, a coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association (NRMCA), has launched a campaign to educate citizens, local and state officials, and industry experts about the inherent dangers of wood-framed construction, particularly in multi-story, residential and commercial buildings. As a grassroots organization, they work with local elected officials and industry workers, from architects to project managers to advocate for the safety benefits of working with concrete-based construction.



(Photo - John Loyer)

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