

Chester County District Attorney's Office

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PRESS RELEASE

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Woman charged in Ashwood Apartments fire that displaced 100 people

The Chester County District Attorney's Office, North Coventry Township Police Department, Pennsylvania State Police and Chester County Fire Marshal announce the arrest of Toni Kirk, age 30, for recklessly causing the fire that completely destroyed the 43-unit Ashwood Apartments in North Coventry Township, Chester County, PA, on July 30, 2020. The fire caused several injuries to residents and first responders, and the displacement and loss of possessions for all 100 residents. Damage is estimated to be at least \$5 million.

The charges against Kirk include: Aggravated Assault, Causing a Catastrophe, Risking a Catastrophe, Recklessly Endangering Another Person, Criminal Mischief, False Reports, and related charges.

The Broome County Sheriff's Office, located in Binghamton, NY, took Kirk into custody on October 6, 2020, without incident.

"While no one, fortunately, lost their lives in the Ashwood Apartments fire, the long-term impact on these people and their families is devastating," said Chester County District Attorney Deb Ryan. "They lost their homes, their belongings, and their sense of safety. We thank the North Coventry Township Police Department, Chester County Fire Marshal, Norco Fire Department, Pennsylvania State Police Fire Marshal Unit, DES, and EMS for their heroic efforts by saving lives. They are a testament to the fearless first responders who risk their own safety in order to protect us every day. We are also grateful to the Broome County Sheriff's Office for their assistance in the arrest of the defendant. We will seek justice for these people by prosecuting Toni Kirk to the fullest extent of the law."

Interim North Coventry Township Police Chief Matt Deicher stated, “We have a long history of working closely with the Chester County District Attorney’s Office, Chester County Detectives, the Fire Marshal’s Office, Department of Emergency Services, the Pennsylvania State Police Fire Marshal Unit and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms in Philadelphia. Thank you for the swift action of our first responders from the Norco Fire Company and their mutual-aid all-volunteer fire companies that assisted in bringing the fire under control and saved the lives of those who were trapped in the burning building. We are blessed that no lives were lost and we are hopeful that justice will serve the victims as the case moves through the courts.”

Chester County Department of Emergency Services Chief Fire Marshal John Weer said, “The great teamwork between the local municipal authorities, Fire Investigators, County Detectives, and the District Attorney’s Office have helped us throughout the investigation of this case. We hope our collaborative work can bring justice to the displaced families and the countless volunteers who risked their lives to put the fire out.”

The allegations in the complaint are the following¹:

A fire was reported at 7:21 p.m. on July 30, 2020, at the Ashwood Apartments located at 782 Worth Boulevard in North Coventry Township, Chester County, PA. A resident reported that fire and smoke were visible in apartment #315 on the third floor and that people were trapped inside.

North Coventry Police officers determined that apartment #315 was occupied by resident Toni Kirk. Police observed Kirk at the scene and stated that she appeared to be under the influence of narcotics.

One victim stated she heard a loud bang, observed the defendant outside apartment #315 and saw smoke coming out of the apartment. The victim gathered her belongings but faced black smoke in the hallway when she tried to leave her apartment. She was overcome by smoke and lost consciousness. Norco Fire Chief Joel McMillian located the victim on the third floor, and carried her out of the building to safety.

¹ A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Several other victims suffered smoke inhalation and respiratory difficulties, as well as other injuries as a result of the fire and required hospitalization. Over 200 fire and EMS personnel responded to the scene to assist. Several firefighters were treated for burns, heat exhaustion and chest pain.

Multiple witnesses said the defendant was the only one to exit apartment #315 after the fire. Subsequently, in an interview with police, Kirk admitted that she was present in the building at the time of the fire, but alleged that another person started the fire. Police later determined that the person the defendant accused was not at the location at the time of the fire.

On July 31, 2020, Chester County Chief Fire Marshal John Weer and Pennsylvania State Police Trooper Timothy Pray determined the fire originated in the living room of apartment #315, on or near a bed or mattress. The fire was ruled incendiary.

Future court dates will be set once the defendant is extradited from New York.

Anyone with further information concerning this fire investigation is asked to call the North Coventry Township Police Department at 610-323-8360.

Approved for release by Deborah Ryan, District Attorney