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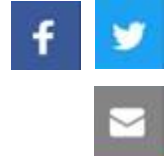
KNUTE SANDAHL
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Idaho Department of Insurance News Release

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New Plymouth Church Fire Cause Determined

BOISE, ID (June 16, 2022) – Investigators from the Idaho State Fire Marshal’s Office and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) have determined the cause of a fire that consumed the New Plymouth Baptist Church on May 15, 2022.

“This investigation was filled with many challenges,” said State Fire Marshal Knute Sandahl. “Due to an earlier storm that afternoon, officials had to consider a lightning strike being a cause. With the assistance of the Bureau of Land Management Boise Dispatch Office, and the Payette County Sheriff’s drone, investigators were able to eliminate this as a viable cause.”

A significant structural safety hazard prevented investigators from entering the burned-out skeleton of the building. Payette County Road and Bridge Department removed an unstable chimney and wall, and an excavator removed debris, aiding in access to the area of interest to the investigation team.

Once investigators were able to safely access the building and sift through debris, it was determined that the fire originated in the basement of the church. The cause was an indeterminate mechanical failure of a chest freezer that was donated to the church several years ago.

“We are relieved this fire is classified as an accident and that there was absolutely no indication of foul play,” said Sandahl. “With this conclusion, the Baptist Church can now begin the rebuilding process.”

The State Fire Marshal’s Office would like to recognize the assistance and cooperation of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Payette County Road and Bridge Department, Payette County Sheriff’s Office, Payette Emergency Management Agency, Bureau of Land Management Boise Dispatch Office, in addition to the New Plymouth Fire Department.

“We are very grateful for all the agencies that cooperated. Without this level of cooperation, we likely would not have been able to conduct this investigation and determine the cause of this fire,” said Sandahl.

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About the Department of Insurance

The Idaho Department of Insurance has been regulating the business of insurance in Idaho since 1901. The mission of the Department is to serve and protect Idahoans by equitably, effectively and efficiently administering the Idaho Insurance Code and the International Fire Code. For more information, please visit us at doi.idaho.gov or email us at consumeraffairs@doi.idaho.gov.

About the State Fire Marshal

The State Fire Marshal’s Office participates in and coordinates an integrated statewide system designed to protect human life from fire and explosions through fire prevention, investigation, and public education activities. The program involves fire prevention activities, fire/arson investigation, code enforcement and the operation of the National Fire Incident Reporting System. The State Fire Marshal’s Office provides assistance to local fire agencies throughout the state.