



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 7, 2010

## Family's Home Burns After Fire Fee Not Paid

Tennessee firefighters in Obion County allowed a family's home to burn to the ground last week because the family had not paid a \$75 fee.

Since Obion County does not have a county-wide firefighting service, South Fulton offers fire coverage to the county residents for a fee of \$75, a policy that dates back nearly 30 years. The Cranick family allegedly "forgot" to pay the fee, and as a result, lost their belongings, as well as their pets — three dogs and a cat.



The fire began when Gene Cranick's grandson was burning trash on the property. According to Fox News, the grandson, who lived in the Cranick home, "started the fire while burning trash in a barrel. He went inside to take a shower and upon returning saw a shed next to the house in flames. It spread despite his efforts to put it out with a garden hose."

The grandson, Lance Cranick, says, "This is something that I've got to live with the rest of my life. To see the house and everything you grew up in burning down before your eyes is kind of harsh."

Lance Cranick explained that South Fulton would not respond to the fire when he called, claiming he was told, "We wasn't on their list."

"I was in shock," he said.

When speaking to the operator, Cranick offered to pay whatever fee was necessary in order to have firefighters come to his home to put out the fire, but his offer was denied.

Firefighters did arrive, but only to stop the fire from spreading to the neighboring property, whose owner had paid the fire fee.

South Fulton Mayor David Crocker asserts, "Anybody that's not inside the city limits of South Fulton, it's a service we offer. Either they accept it or they don't."

However, Harold Schaitberger of the International Association of Firefighters sees the decision to allow the home to burn as "incredibly irresponsible."

"Professional, career firefighters shouldn't be forced to check a list before running out the door to see which homeowners have paid up. They get in their trucks and go."

South Fulton's mayor, however, claimed that residents cannot be permitted to pay the fee on the spot, as then the only people who would pay the fee are those whose homes are on fire.



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Addressing the media's vilification of the South Fulton fire department, conservative pundit Glenn Beck defended the department on his radio show:

Here's the thing that those who are just acting on raw feeling are not going to understand. It's \$75 at the beginning of the year. You pay it and they put your house it. If you don't pay it, they don't put your house out. If the firefighters put out the Cranick's home even though they didn't pay the fee, nobody would ever pay the \$75. The fire department doesn't have the money to put out people's fires for free. What is the \$75 for? To keep the firemen available. To keep the firetrucks running. To have people employed to put the fire out. If you don't pay your \$75, that hurts the fire department. They can't use those resources and you would be sponging off of your neighbor's \$75. This is the same case for paying health insurance fees.

Similarly, *National Review*, came to the defense of the fire department, contending that the incident would likely serve as an "important lesson," and will probably "save more houses over the long haul. I know that if I opted out of the program before, I would be more likely to opt-in now. As Edmund Burke said, example is the school of mankind and he will learn from no other."

Evidently, Cranick's son did not agree with such rationale, as he was later arrested for attacking Fire Chief David Wilds at the firehouse for allowing his father's home to burn down.

Now living in a trailer home on his property, Gene Cranick indicates that his homeowner's insurance will cover some of what was lost.

"Insurance is going to pay for what money I had on the policy, looks like. But like everything else, I didn't have enough."

Cranick's wife, Paulette, has stated that she does not blame the firefighters for allowing her home to burn, asserting that they were simply following orders and admitting that they simply forgot to pay the fee.

"You can't blame them if they have to do what the boss says to do. I've had firemen call and apologize."

The community has offered its help to the Cranick family, but the family graciously turned down the offers, as they are receiving help from their insurance company.

Local news station ABC 7 reports that the Obion County Budget Committee had decided to expand its subscription-only fire service to additional towns.

Union City Fire Department Chief Kelly Edmison objects to the expansion, however, supporting instead a 13-cent increase in property taxes, which is allegedly all it would take to fund fire services for towns within the county.

Edmison adds, "It eliminates this having 911 or whoever check to say, 'Are they covered or not covered?' "

*Photo: Gene Cranick near his burning home in South Fulton, Tenn: AP Images*



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