

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District

Press Release

**Subject: Family Saved by Smoke Alarms in Residential Structure Fire
900 block of Walnut St., Martinez**

Release Date: 1-17-12

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The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District responded to a fire in a two story single family dwelling at 3:55am this morning in the 900 block of Walnut Street in Martinez. The first fire engine arrived within 5 minutes of being dispatched and found the home fully involved in fire. Fire hose lines were pulled to protect exposures and adjacent homes from the fire. All occupants were able to exit the home prior to our arrival. The occupants of the home, four adults and one juvenile, were awakened to the fire by the smoke alarms in the home – but even with that notification had very little time to escape and were forced to run through an area involved in fire in order to exit the home. One of the occupants was transported to a local hospital as a precaution for smoke inhalation.

It took a total of 17 firefighters from four engines and one ladder truck 70 minutes to bring the fire under control. Adjacent homes were saved and there was no damage to neighboring properties. The home was a total loss with damages estimated at \$350,000. The American Red Cross was assisting the occupants with temporary housing.

The cause of the fire appears to be an ignition of combustible material on the exterior of the home by embers or heat from the home's pellet stove exhaust system. Given the extremely dry conditions we are currently experiencing, homeowners are encouraged to maintain a minimum 10 feet of clearance around chimneys and fireplace insert exhausts free of dry combustible material or vegetation.

One of the occupants of the home stated he had just replaced the smoke alarm batteries throughout the home the night before the fire and credits the new batteries and the smoke alarms for saving his family. Working smoke alarms save lives – batteries should be changed every 6 months and the alarms tested every month.