



Bob Rebtay
district fire chief



Al Havner
police sergeant



Gil Kohls
police officer

Recovering Hills fire victim is hospitalized

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Middlebelt, smoke was rolling from the front door of Bolda's mobile home.

Opening the closed but unlocked front door, Rebtay found heavy smoke. "I couldn't see any flames at first, but then saw fire coming from the stove," he said.

After crawling to the range and turning off the burner, Rebtay tried to crawl down the hallway to the bedroom. But heavy smoke drove him back. That's when he found Bolda lying face down in front of the couch, very groggy.

Rebtay could only drag Bolda — breathing but gasping for air — as far as the front door. Havner and Kohls then helped pull Bolda outside and lay him on his back on a snow bank until paramedics and firefighters arrived.

REBTOY THEN went back inside with a flashlight to look for others. Havner and Kohls went to the rear door and broke a window to gain entry.

After their search turned up no other victims, Rebtay said he grabbed Kohls' fire extinguisher and "knocked down 90 percent of the fire with about two seconds' worth of dry chemical extinguisher."

Rebtay said he never felt in danger. "It all happened really fast, but it was not that hot on the floor, crawling on my hands and knees. It wasn't a big fire."

A firefighter for 19 years, Rebtay said this was the first time he had to rescue anyone from a burning building.

"I've been through numerous simulated rescues, but they're nothing like the real thing. In this case, we were dealing with a real person — not with a dummy," Rebtay said.

Havner sustained superficial burns to a hand. He didn't require hospital treatment.

Both Hume and Rebtay think Bolda fell asleep on the couch, then was

awakened and stood up. That is when they think he fell to the floor face down after breathing super-heated gases and fumes from burning plastic.

"I'D LIKE to emphasize that in a fire situation, immediately roll out of bed onto the floor," Hume said. "Do not stand up. Heat can sear your lungs. The temperature can be 100 degrees at floor level but 800 degrees at ceiling level."

There's no way of telling how long the fire burned before it was reported, the fire marshal added.

The fire started in the pan and spread to the curtains and cabinets above the range and sink. It became so intense it charred the cabinets in the hallway and the walls in the bedroom. It melted the refrigerator door in the kitchen and the smoke detector base on the bedroom ceiling.

Bolda told Hume he had taken the smoke detector apart in an effort to fix it. "He said he put it back together but it buzzed constantly so he took the battery out," Hume said.

Test smoke detectors on a regular basis and make sure they're always working. "I'm sure Mr. Bolda never thought he'd have a fire, but they do happen," Hume said.

Bolda's mother told Hume her son started work for the Rubbish Co. in Farmington Hills a week before the fire.

COMMENTING ABOUT his officers, Police Chief William Dwyer said Havner, a 21-year veteran, and Kohls, with the department since 1980, "went beyond the call of duty."

"I'm very proud of the action they took and the life they saved. They depict the professionalism of the police department and the police officers within the department," Dwyer said.

Saying Rebtay did what he was trained to do, Baldwin said Rebtay's and the police officers' "fast action

had a bearing on why Mr. Bolda survived with the level of injury he had. Another 5-10 minutes, his injuries would have been much more severe, if not fatal."

Fire damage was estimated at \$1,000.



Fire Marshal Stephen Hume checks a pan of potatoes on the kitchen range, where the fire started.

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