

Parents sue building's owner over Las Vegas woman's death in fire



Fire crews battle a blaze at Solaire Apartments, 1750 Karen Ave., in Las Vegas on Aug. 5, 2018. (Clark County Fire Department)

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The parents of a 26-year-old woman who died in a Las Vegas apartment fire last year have filed a wrongful death lawsuit accusing the building's owner of negligence.

Myriam Hernandez Estrada died in an Aug. 5 fire at the Solaire Apartments complex on East Karen Avenue while trying to rescue her family's pet Chihuahua, Andy, Las Vegas attorney Joe Benson said.

“Based on the currently available information, Myriam D. Hernandez-Estrada had the opportunity to exit the apartment contemporaneously with her mother but did not do so,” Lerner wrote in a statement Thursday.

“Solaire Apartments is committed to providing clean, safe, and stable living environments to working families.”

The deadly blaze was spotlighted in November as part of a [Las Vegas Review-Journal investigative series](#) about fire safety in aging apartment buildings.

“Valley of Fires” found that local governments in Clark County have little power to force aging apartment complexes to make safety upgrades beyond what codes required at the time they were built. Fires have killed 159 people in the valley since 2008, the investigation found.

Solaire caught fire 14 times in 2017 and at least three times in 2018. Built in 1979, the complex's design makes it susceptible to spreading fires, Clark County Fire Chief Greg Cassell told the Review-Journal.

Cause of fire undetermined

The fire that killed Estrada burned through common attic space, which stretches the length of an apartment building. Solaire's buildings also are tightly packed, Cassell said.

Investigators were unable to determine what started the fire, county spokeswoman Stacey Welling wrote in an email Thursday.

“Because of the amount of damage, they were unable to pinpoint exactly where it started or how,” she wrote.

Benson said he hopes the lawsuit sparks a larger conversation about fire safety codes for older local buildings.

“We want to make sure that safety measures are taken, even in older buildings,” Benson said. “Generally speaking these codes need to come up to par with technology: Wi-Fi smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, sprinkler systems.”

Following the publication of “Valley of Fires,” local [elected officials pledged](#) to find ways to improve fire safety requirements for residential buildings.

Last month the Clark County Commission updated its fire code, following a change to national standards, that relates to temporary outdoor structures, fire sprinklers and more.

Commissioner Justin Jones said safety “was definitely part of it,” but the changes were not in response to aging apartments, and it was unclear how much of the update would alleviate associated problems.

Yet, Jones noted that there were older apartments in his district and said he plans to have additional conversations with the county fire chief and building department to determine whether recent changes were sufficient.

“I’m certainly keeping my eye on the issue,” he said.

Complex was scrutinized

Living conditions at Solaire were under scrutiny by the county about a year before Estrada died, county code enforcement records show.

In August 2017, building inspector Jane Reyling wrote in a report that Solaire was allowing a tenant to live in a building that still had extensive damage from a fire in April 2016.

Twelve of the building’s 16 apartments were damaged in the fire, Reyling wrote. The building’s attic was entirely open to the sky, and it was leaking water from its north side.

But management would not relocate a tenant living in one of the four remaining apartments, Reyling wrote. Days later the county issued an order for the building to be vacated and either repaired or demolished, according to the report.

A month earlier Reyling had reported that a different building at Solaire that caught fire in March 2017 had yet to be torn down and was only boarded and fenced.

Roof tiles had begun to fall from the damaged building, according to the complex's guards, Reyling wrote. An infestation also had begun.

"The building has become a habitat for vermin, rats, mice, insects, cats and so forth," she wrote.

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