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## Clues sought in W.Va. blaze as toll climbs

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By Louis Brems, The Herald-Dispatch

Huntington fire chief Greg Fuller addresses the media on Sunday outside of the Emmons Jr. apartment building in Huntington, W. Va., where a fire killed nine people, including a child.

Lucas, 17; and Quintin Lucas, 14. An eighth victim, a man, has not been identified, Huntington Police Department Capt. Rick Eplin said, and the gender and identity of the ninth victim have not been determined, according to Fuller.

"Unless more names come forward, we think we have located everyone," Eplin said Monday evening. "There is always a possibility somebody could come forward tonight or tomorrow and report another loved one missing, and then that changes the complexion entirely. But right now we are just kind of waiting and holding our breath that there are no other victims in there."

Saleh died Monday at Cabell Huntington Hospital, according to Kathy Cosco, media and community relations manager. Saleh was one of four people hospitalized after the fire.

Two patients were listed in serious condition Monday morning, while another had been released, Cosco said.

According to Huntington Police reports, the bodies of the teenage siblings were found in the building by Huntington firefighters sometime Sunday morning.

Marshall University spokesman Dave Wellman confirmed that one of the nine victims was a student at the school but declined to give the name.

Search and rescue crews and investigators were able to explore parts of the building Monday but encountered delays and will resume their work Tuesday, Fuller said. He compared the search to coal mining.

"You might characterize it as tunneling," Fuller said. "You dig a little bit and shore up behind you a little bit. It's a slow and methodical search, but we have to keep everyone safe."

The fire erupted shortly after 11 p.m. Saturday. Flames and thick, white smoke billowed from the front and back of the building as firefighters from several local departments rescued 24 people.

As many as 100 people were believed to be in the Emmons Jr. and neighboring 32-unit Emmons Sr. building when the fire started, Fuller said. The fire did not spread to the Emmons Sr. building.

Fuller called the fire the worst in Huntington in more than 50 years. In November 1952, a ward building at Huntington State Hospital (now Mildred Mitchell Bateman Hospital) caught fire, killing 17 people.

"This is the worst fire I've ever seen," Fuller said.

Gov. Joe Manchin met with first-responders and members of the media Monday. He offered his condolences to the victims of the fire and any help the state can provide.

"This is a horrible, horrible, horrible tragedy," he said. "My heart goes out to all of the families who lost loved ones."

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