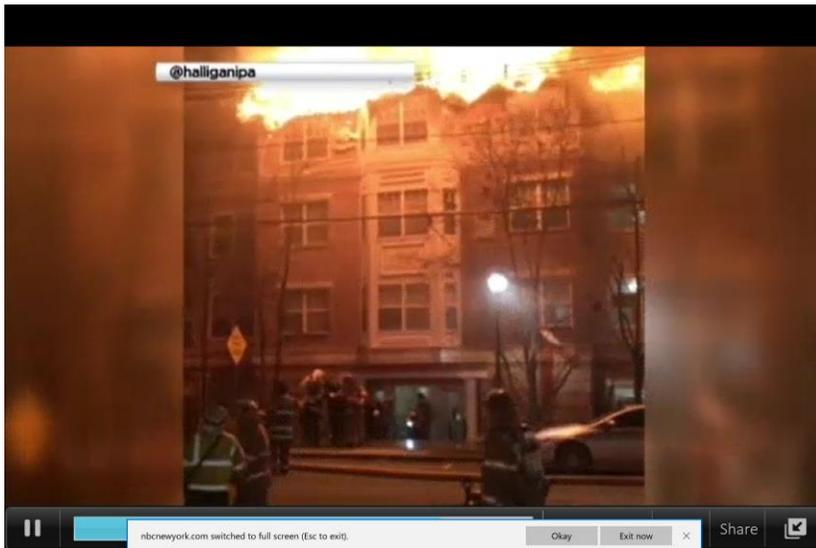
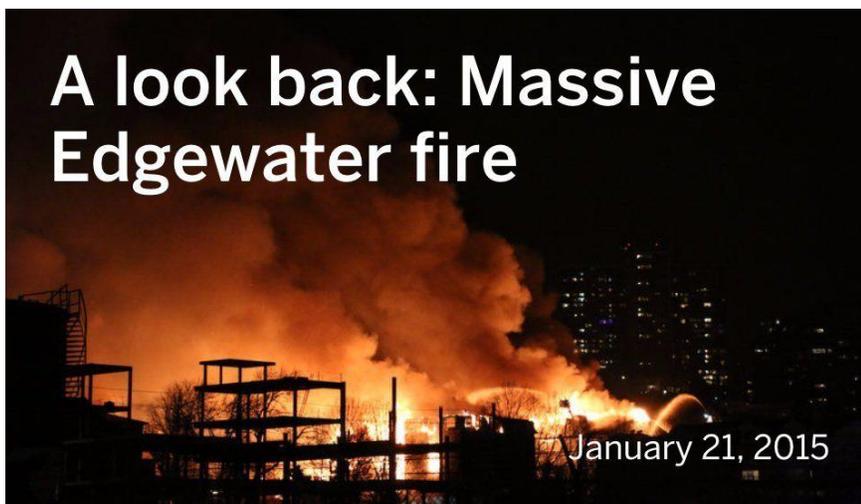


# Luxury New Jersey Apartment Complex Destroyed in Massive Fire



**Dozens of families** are displaced after a massive fire ripped through a luxury apartment building in New Jersey. Michael George reports. (Published Thursday, Jan. 22, 2015)



## Luxury Apartment Complex Fire Accidental: Officials

By Brian Thompson, Pat Battle, Katherine Creag, Brynn Gingras and Michael George, NBC4 NewYork

The quick-moving inferno that ravaged part of a **luxury apartment complex** in New Jersey has been determined to be "totally accidental," sparked when a plumbing repair made by maintenance workers ignited in the walls and spread through the building, officials said Thursday.

"There was nothing suspicious about it, and we have complete verification, and there's no doubt about it," said Edgewater Police Chief William Skidmore. "It's just a tragic accident."

Construction, History Scrutinized After NJ Inferno

Still, questions linger over how the fire was able to spread so quickly and thoroughly as hundreds of displaced residents try to cope with the devastating loss of their homes and belongings.

The blaze at the Avalon on the Hudson complex in Edgewater took more than 15 hours to contain after it broke out Wednesday evening. By Thursday morning, more than 200 of the 408 units in the complex were reduced to rubble. About 500 people who lived in the complex are permanently displaced, and another 500 in buildings affected by the fire at the complex had to temporarily leave their homes, authorities said.

Firefighters struggled for hours to quench the flames at Avalon on the Hudson on Russell Avenue in Edgewater, 15 years after an earlier blaze burned the same complex to the ground as it was being built.

"We left in what we had," displaced resident Tamara Talbott said. "**We got the kids and the dogs.** Our cars are all underneath. There's nothing left."

The fire broke out around 4:30 p.m., and the 408-unit building was quickly evacuated. After firefighters first responded, the fire appeared under control for some time, but it escalated in the back part of the complex, which responders had a hard time accessing.

Source: Luxury New Jersey Apartment Complex Destroyed in Massive Fire | NBC New York  
<http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Edgewater-New-Jersey-Apartment-Complex-Fire-289367561.html#ixzz4f53drwxn>

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Aftermath and cleanup of the five alarm fire at the Avalon Apartments on Russell Avenue in Edgewater, NJ 1/22/15 11:20:26 AM (Alex Remnick | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

## 10 months after Edgewater blaze, fire safety codes unchanged

By [Tim Darragh](#) | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#) on November 03, 2015 at 7:15 AM, updated November 03, 2015 at 11:33 AM

Nearly 10 months after a devastating fire in Edgewater prompted pledges to toughen New Jersey's building codes, the codes have been updated but the sections dealing with fire safety issues raised by the blaze have not changed, state officials say.

The state Department of Community Affairs this summer adopted the new code, which makes technical changes and adopts new products and techniques from the last adopted version from 2009. It does not include, however, any of the fire safety measures officials called for such as limitations on building size and tougher sprinkler and

firewall measures following the Jan. 21 fire at the Avalon at Edgewater apartment complex, said state Sen. Loretta Weinberg, (D-Bergen).

Maintenance workers accidentally started the fire, which climbed up and through open, unsprinklered spaces allowed under the construction code. The fire destroyed hundreds of apartments, displacing around 1,000 people at least temporarily.

**Since then, fire safety officials and concerned citizen groups have targeted those sections of the code allowing multi-story, multi-family to be built using lightweight wood construction.**

Weinberg said she is "extremely disappointed" that tougher fire safety measures were not adopted.

"We are at no progress," she said.

MORE: Edgewater fire prompts third bill to regulate light wood construction

Weinberg is especially disturbed because Avalon Bay, the real estate developer that built the 408-unit complex in Edgewater, is planning another one in Teaneck, her home town.

Additionally, Weinberg thought stronger fire safety codes were on the radar of Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Charles A. Richman. In a letter to Richman, Weinberg said the state could have exceeded the International Code Council's standards under state law if DCA found that holes in the code presented a threat to public safety.

DCA did not respond to questions about Weinberg's letter to Richman. Avalon Bay, which has more than a dozen developments statewide and recently opened one in Roseland, also declined comment.

Although the new code has not changed with regard to the fire safety measures Weinberg sought, legislators, citizen and industry groups have been at work behind the scenes to amend the code legislatively.

Three bills already introduced await legislative action, and a representative for Speaker Vincent Prieto said he will be submitting one this month when the General Assembly meets.

Spokesman Phil Swibinski said Prieto and other legislators have been meeting with interested citizen groups, builders, unions and firefighters to gather input on possible changes to the code. Swibinski said Prieto would likely be looking to study how the code can be improved to address building materials and open loft spaces in buildings, which may have contributed to the swift spread of the Edgewater blaze.

The state Builders Association wants to ensure that code changes keep new construction safe but also affordable, said Jeff Kowlakowski, vice president of government affairs. "We're still in a dialogue on these things," he said. In addition, the state Fire Commission, an advisory board to the DCA, will meet later this month and could have code recommendations for the department, said Larry Wood, past president of the New Jersey State Fire Chiefs Association and a member of the commission.

He said resident groups have been particularly active in lobbying for strong fire protection measures.

"There's been a real uproar from some citizens," Wood said.

Tim Darragh may be reached at [tdarragh@njadvancemedia.com](mailto:tdarragh@njadvancemedia.com). Follow him on Twitter @timdarragh.