

# Did battalion chief sleep through fire?

**SOUTH SIDE | Investigation in progress; no one injured in late-night blaze**

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BY FRANK SPIELMAN

City Hall Reporter  
fspielman@suntimes.com

The Chicago Fire Department has launched an internal investigation to find out why a veteran battalion chief allegedly slept through a South Side fire.

The embarrassing incident happened last week when a fire bomb was apparently thrown into a home at 8936 S. University.

Fire alarms sounded at Engine Company No. 72, 7982 S. South Chicago Ave. The 23rd Battalion, housed there, responded to the 4 a.m. call. When they got to the fire, they allegedly noticed that 23rd Battalion Chief DeKalb Walcott was not there to call the shots.

"He was asleep and missed a run. There was a run in the middle of the night, and he didn't make it," said a source familiar with the incident.

"The battalion chief rides by himself — not on the fire engine. He gets himself to the fire. Everybody else goes on the apparatus. He didn't get to the fire."

Fire Department spokesman Larry Langford refused to identify Walcott as the subject of the investigation.

He would only say, "There is an

investigation to see why this particular member did not make it to the fire. Once the investigation is complete, discipline will be doled out if appropriate."

While the incident is an embarrassment to the Fire Department, there were apparently no dire consequences.

No one was injured, and it was not an extra-alarm fire, Langford said. And he noted, "There are always at least two chiefs at a working fire. The guy could get into a traffic accident on the way, so the second chief takes over. The second chief handled the fire."

Another source described a more chaotic scene — and questioned how the investigation was handled.

When firefighters arrived at the scene and realized their battalion chief was not there, the source said radio calls went out to locate Walcott and a replacement. The house was engulfed in flames, and there were rescues to be made, the source said.

Walcott could not be reached for comment. A firefighter who answered the phone at Engine 72 said he was not at liberty to discuss the incident.

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