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Smoke killed 80-year-old in her bed

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HOBOKEN - The Regional Medical Examiner's Office confirmed yesterday that an 80-year-old woman who perished in a Hoboken fire on Wednesday died from smoke inhalation.

The exact cause of the blaze at 1202 Hudson St. - that took the life of Paula Otero and left more than 60 families homeless - is still under investigation, but it is preliminarily being considered an accident, Hudson County Prosecutor Edward DeFazio said yesterday.

The fire started just after 3 a.m. in the bedroom of an apartment on the top floor of the five-story building owned by the Applied Housing company, officials said.

When two men in the apartment discovered the blaze, they tried to put it out themselves before calling 911, but the fire quickly overtook them, officials said.

Rescue workers found Otero in the bed of her third-floor apartment.

Some tenants of the complex at 1202-1208 Hudson St. said firefighters should have been more diligent in getting people out of the burning building.

But Hoboken Public Safety Director Bill Bergin said firefighters did two searches of the building, a preliminary one where they quickly knocked on tenants' doors and then a more thorough secondary one. Firefighters found Otero's body during the second search around 6 a.m.

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