

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **State Fire Marshal Stresses Home Fire Safety In Light of Tragic Panola County Fire**

JACKSON – Mississippi Insurance Commissioner and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney is expressing his condolences to the families of the victims of Friday morning's tragic home fire that claimed four lives and he continues to stress home fire safety.

"First of all, let me say that our hearts go out to the victims of this tragedy, as well as to their families and loved ones," Chaney said. "It's difficult to find the words to comfort someone in the face of such loss but everyone will be constantly in our thoughts and prayers."

Chaney said the State Fire Marshal's office is working closely with the local authorities to find the cause of this tragic fire to better prevent such fires in the future. He noted that it is very early in the investigation and authorities cannot say what caused this particular fire. "However, we do know that fires like this happen much more frequently whenever the temperature drops like it has the last few days," he said.

Chaney also praised the quick action of Marchello Stokes, who was passing by and saw the fire. Ricky Davis, the state Chief Deputy Fire Marshal is on the scene leading the investigation and said Stokes was able to blow his vehicle's horn and awaken the other residents of the home. "Mr. Stokes' quick actions may well have prevented further loss of life," Chaney said.

Friday's deaths bring the total of fire deaths in the state to 20 for this year. "The loss of even one life in a fire is one too many," the Fire Marshal said. "So, it's critical to fire safety to install and maintain working smoke alarms in your home – they are proven to cut the risk of fire deaths by half."

“Also, be careful with heating sources, be it a fireplace, a wood-burning stove or a space heater,” Chaney said. “Never use your kitchen stove as a heating source. Never use an extension cord with an electric space heater and keep all types of space heaters away from any other objects. Also, make and practice a family escape plan.”

Instructions on how to create a family escape plan and other home safety tips can be found on the special Cooking and Heating Fire Safety Page of the Mississippi Insurance Department web site at: <http://www.mid.state.ms.us/> .

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