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REPORT ON DEADLY FIRE GREENWOOD NURSING HOME, LAX STANDARDS FAULTED BY U.S.

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Lax fire safety standards contributed to the swift-moving fire that killed 16 people at the former Greenwood Health Center **nursing home** in Hartford last year, according to a federal investigation that also blamed the **nursing home** for providing inaccurate information about how often it conducted fire drills for residents.

The **nursing home** in the city's Parkville section, which has since been renamed the Park Place Health Center, also was faulted in a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office for the staff's failure to follow prescribed procedures when the fire started.

The deadliest **nursing home** fire in the U.S. in more than two decades took place at the Greenwood facility during the pre-dawn hours of Feb. 26, 2003. By the time the fire was doused, it had claimed the lives of 10 **nursing home** patients and residents, many of whom were too old or physically incapacitated to save themselves from the smoke and flames.

Six more hospitalized patients would die in the weeks to follow, and investigators eventually concluded that the blaze had been set by a mentally disturbed patient who had been playing with a lighter in her bed. The patient, 24-year-old Lesley Andino, now faces 16 counts of arson murder in connection with the blaze, but state psychologists are still trying to determine if she is competent to stand trial.

The investigation conducted by the Government Accountability Office, the investigative branch of the federal government formerly known as the General Accounting Office, was released Friday. The investigation looked not only at the causes of the Hartford fire, but also at a similar **nursing home** fire that killed 15 patients seven months later outside Nashville.

Besides concluding that lax federal and state standards had contributed to both fires, the investigation revealed for the first time that Greenwood staff members had provided inaccurate information to fire inspectors about how often fire drills were conducted among night staff.

The government report said inspectors for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, who routinely check nursing homes across the country for fire safety hazards, were given inaccurate documentation indicating that fire drills were regularly conducted on the night shift, which is when the deadly blaze took place.

The report also faulted the **nursing home** staff for failing to properly implement the **nursing home's** fire response plan when the fire broke out, particularly by failing to shut the patients' room doors after the fire started.

"Inadequate staff response contributed to the loss of life in the Hartford fire," the report said.

The management company that operated the Greenwood facility at the time of the fire, Lexington Highgreen Holding, Inc., has since declared bankruptcy. The home is now operated by Spectrum Healthcare LLC of Vernon. Howard Dickstein, the company's president and CEO, was not available to comment Friday on whether the home is now complying with all federal inspection guidelines.

Among the investigation's critical findings was the fact that neither Greenwood nor the Tennessee **nursing home** had been required to install sprinklers because the homes were built before **sprinkler** laws in both states

were passed. Since the fires, both states have adopted legislation requiring all nursing homes to install sprinklers regardless of how old they are, and all state nursing homes are expected to be fitted with sprinklers by the end of next year.

The investigation also found that the Greenwood fire was able to spread, in part, because federal standards did not require the homes to install smoke detectors in patients' rooms.

``Investigations of the Hartford and Nashville fires suggested that the lack of smoke detectors in resident rooms where the fires started may have delayed staff response and activation of the buildings' fire alarms," the report said.

Dickstein and other Spectrum officials, after reopening the fire-damaged wing of the facility this year, showed off a range of new fire safety measures including sprinklers and smoke detectors installed in every room.

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