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High-rise fire raises fears for the elderly, disabled No one hurt, but some tenants unable to flee west Oak Cliff tower

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A fire Sunday at a Dallas Housing Authority high-rise in west Oak Cliff sent residents fleeing when smoke in a trash chute spread to every floor.

There were no injuries, and only minor building damage was reported in the fire at the 12-story Cliff Manor Apartments. Fire officials said it could have been much worse.

Dozens of elderly and disabled residents living on upper floors could not leave the building after elevators were deactivated.

"I was really upset because I knew I couldn't go down all them stairs," said Shirley Hamilton, who uses a cane to walk. She made her way from the 12th floor to the 10th, where she could get fresh air.

"There needs to be a way for the disabled to get out besides going down them stairs," she said.

Dallas Fire-Rescue Lt. Joel Lavender said, "That's something that maybe should be addressed is where do you place tenants when some are non-ambulatory. Maybe they should change it so they live on lower floors.

"When you put all the 'what ifs' into play, we're very fortunate."

Some residents were able to escape the building in the 2400 block of Fort Worth Avenue.

Dallas Fire-Rescue crews evacuated others on the first three floors before the fire was put out and the smoke cleared, then went door to door checking on the remaining residents, Lt. Lavender said.

Some of the building's 170 residents complained that some fence gates were chained shut.

Stairwells on the sides of the building open onto a fenced-in yard and parking area. The pedestrian gates were chained, and only residents with access cards could open the vehicle gates.

"If there's a big fire and the building blows up, you're stuck, unless you have a card," said Raymond Walker, a caregiver for one of the residents.

Dallas Housing Authority spokeswoman Michelle Raglon said the agency has policies for fire evacuation as well as determining residents' location in a building, "but I can't cite them for you tonight because I don't have them."

Lt. Lavender said Deputy Chief of Fire Prevention Joe Pierce will look into the situation.

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MAP(S): (TOM SETZER/Staff Artist) Site of tower fire.

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