

# Two children die in home fire

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COLUMBIA FALLS — A fire gutting the David R. Shaffer home northwest of Columbia Falls Tuesday afternoon claimed the lives of two young children trapped in an upstairs bedroom.

Candy Shaffer, 2, and Warren Peterson, 4, son of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Peterson, died of smoke inhalation, said Don Anderson, Colum-

bia Falls Volunteer Department (CFVD) fire chief.

According to Anderson, Mrs. Shaffer was painting a door in the home and while her back was turned the Peterson child began playing with a stick in the burning fireplace.

Clothes in a nearby closet caught fire, Anderson said. When Mrs. Shaffer's attempts to put the fire out were unsuccessful, she tried calling the fire department, but found the

phone was dead, he said.

Dashing to a neighbor's home to alert the fire department, Mrs. Shaffer took the boy with her, he said.

By the time she returned, the child had wandered back into the burning two-story frame home.

"It was one of the toughest fires I've been on," said Anderson, a 15-year veteran of the department.

The fire was extremely intense and it was difficult to ventilate it, he

said. Attempts to rescue the children and combat the blaze were also hampered by dense, chemical smoke from burning synthetic fabrics and paint supplies in the home.

"We just about lost one of the firemen during the fire," he said.

As the firefighter worked his way to the top of a stair well, the fire blossomed behind him, forcing him to jump over it to the bottom of the stairs, Anderson said.

One pumper, three tankers and 20 men from the CFVD and one tanker and five men from the Bad Rock Volunteer Fire Department fought the blaze which began sometime after 4 p.m.

Firefighters remained on the scene until about 10 p.m., Anderson said, and were called back to what remained of the Shaffer residence early this morning to suppress another flare up.

He said at about 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, the department's reserve force was called to a minor fire north of the town.

About 10,000 gallons of water were poured on the Shaffer fire and at least eight air tanks were used to search for the trapped children, he said.

The Shaffer's other five children were not in the house at the time of the fire, Anderson said.