Flames destroy, damage homes in, around Gothenburg.

Two house fires over the weekend and a handful of ambulance calls—on the heels of an elevator explosion—meant little sleep for members of the Gothenburg Fire Department.

Fire chief Mark Ballmer said the department responded to a New Year's Eve house fire Friday at 3:30 p.m. at the rural home of Joe and Patti Herndon.

When members arrived, Ballmer said flames flared on an exterior wall of the house where a wood-burning stove, encased in a wooden structure, piped heat into the home.

"I think the fire got too hot and started the exterior wall on fire," the fire chief said.

Ballmer said there was fire damage where the fire originated and smoke damage to the rest of the house.

The Herndons called in the fire, he said, and no one was injured.

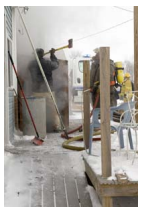
Ballmer estimated damage at $50,000-plus.

Because the structure is not liveable, the Herndons stayed with Jane Herndon—Joe's sister in law—until moving into a rental home.

What the public can learn from the fire, Ballmer said, is to make sure codes are followed when installing wood-burning stoves.

"Because whenever the temperature is frigid, it taxes and stresses our heating systems," Ballmer explained.

With temperatures hovering around the 0-degree mark, Ballmer said the department experienced problems at both house fires with hoses and truck lines freezing.



On Monday, Joe said the Herndons are fine and have everything they need.

A second fire call came at about 8:30 p.m. on New Year's Day when a passerby spotted flames and smoke from windows at a home at 213 18th St.

The owner of the home, Kim Nielsen, lived there with daughters Cheyenne, 13, and Sabrina, 11, who were not there at the time of the fire.

Kim said they had gone to celebrate the holidays with friends about two blocks away.

Like they did at the Herndon house, Ballmer said fire fighters strapped on air packs and went inside the burning house.

The spouse of a fire fighter called Kim to tell her about the fire and to make sure her children were with her.

“It’s a very helpless feeling to stand and watch your house burn,” Kim said. “But at least no one was hurt.”

With multiple roof lines and numerous nooks and crannies, he said the fire was challenging even though the department had extinguished flames in about two hours.

Waiting for a fire marshal to arrive from Ogallala to determine the cause of the fire took another two hours, Ballmer said.

The cause was a damaged cord from a television that was left on in a bedroom, he said.

“The weak spot got hot and started the fire,” Ballmer said, noting that property owners want to make sure not to pinch or ball up cords. “Keep them as flat as possible so they dissipate heat and don’t overtax electrical outlets.”

Ballmer estimated the home to be a loss with

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