

# Family of woman, great-granddaughter who perished in blaze sue makers of faulty smoke detectors

April 30, 2014 2:07 PM

By JON CAMPISI

The family of a Philadelphia woman who died alongside her 4-year-old

great-granddaughter in a house fire because of malfunctioning smoke alarms has filed a wrongful death complaint in state court against the City of Philadelphia and the makers of the allegedly faulty product.

Lawyers representing relatives of the late Ardalia Bumpus and Nevaeh Bryant filed suit in early April at the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas against the city, Universal Security Instruments Inc., USI Electric Inc., and home improvement retailer Home Depot over the deaths of Bumpus, 79, and her young great-granddaughter, which occurred in the spring of 2012.

According to the civil action, Bumpus and Bryant were asleep in the woman's North Philadelphia home when a fire broke out.

The two, however, did not know about the blaze because the smoke detectors in the home failed to sound.

Philadelphia firefighters responded to the scene, but fire hydrants that were on the street where the home is located were not functioning, delaying their response, according to the civil action.

The bodies of Bumpus and her great-granddaughter were later discovered in an upstairs bedroom, according to the lawsuit.

The complaint takes issues with the ionization smoke detectors manufactured by Universal Security Instruments, which, the plaintiffs allege, often fail to detect smoldering fires, or those that burn slowly and fill a home with smoke.

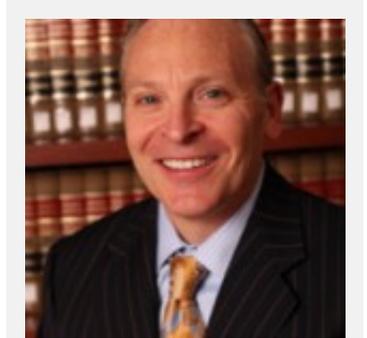
Eighty percent of residential fires are smoldering fires, the plaintiff's law firm contends, and most occur at night when the occupants of a home are asleep.

"It is unacceptable for a family to have taken the proper fire safety precautions and still have this as an end result," attorney Joseph L. Messa, Jr., who is representing the plaintiffs, said in a statement. "Both Universal and the City of Philadelphia failed the family of Ardalia Bumpus and Nevaeh Bryant with their non-functioning and, therefore, useless safety equipment."

Messa said that Universal has known "for years" about the problems with ionization technology, and that the company was aware there was an issue with such smoke detectors failing to sound in the presence of smoke.

Despite this apparent knowledge, however, the company continues to market and sell the allegedly faulty products to consumers across the country.

"The deaths of Ardalia and Nevaeh are a tragedy," Messa said in his statement. "Universal and other smoke detector manufacturers who continue to sell ionization smoke alarms are knowingly endangering the lives of



Joseph Messa, Jr.

countless people who believe they are being protected.”

The lawsuit faults the city because it did not have operative fire hydrants on Firth Street, which impeded the fire department’s ability to fight the blaze and rescue the occupants.

Firefighters ended up having to use hydrants that were located several blocks away from the home, according to the complaint.

The lead plaintiffs in the case are Rodney Bumpus, Tommasine Adams, co-administrators of the estate of Ardalia Bumpus, and Jimia Thomas, administratrix of the estate of Nevaeh Bryant.

The complaint contains counts of products liability, negligence, breach of warranty, wrongful death and survival action.

The plaintiffs seek compensatory and punitive damages in excess of \$50,000, plus interest, costs and other relief.