

December 31, 2011

Mr. Michael Barnes
State Coroner
Office of the State Coroner
GPO Box 1649, Brisbane, QLD 4001
By Email: state.coroner@justice.qld.gov.au

RE: "Golinski" Fatal Fire

Dear Mr. Barnes

My name is Joseph Fleming. I am a Deputy Chief on the Boston Fire Dept. in Massachusetts. I have been researching smoke alarms for over 20 years and may have information that would prove useful in your investigation into the tragic "Golinski" fire.

1st – My Background - (This will help explain why a Fire Chief in the US is writing a letter to an official in Australia.)

- My resume is attached.
- A letter from the AFAC is attached which refers to my research.

2nd – Peer Reviewed Research. I am also attaching 2 papers that I either authored or co-authored, both of which have appeared in peer reviewed journals in the US. They may help your investigation.

- Babrauskas, V., Fleming, J. M., and Russell, D. B., "RSET/ASET, A Flawed Concept for Fire Safety Assessment," *Fire & Materials* **34**, 341-355 (2010).
- Fleming, J. M., "Smoke Detectors and the Investigation of Fatal Fires," *Fire & Arson Investigator*, the official magazine of International Association of Arson Investigators, May (2000)...

3rd – Position papers of fire safety organizations in the US and Australia.

- Position of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), US, in favor of photoelectric smoke alarms.
- Position of The Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC), AU, in favor of photoelectric smoke alarms.
- Information from Queensland Fire Marshal in favor of photoelectric alarms. **(This progressive view of the Queensland Fire Service should greatly aid the investigation.)**

Here are my suggestions for your investigation.

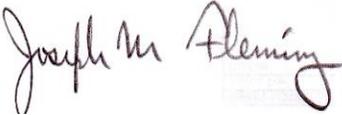
1. I suspect it is typical that coroners focus on the cause and origin of the fire. For example, was it arson or accidental? When an investigation goes further it typically focuses on the immediate cause of the fatality. For example, was it smoke inhalation? I would like to suggest that this investigation go further and investigate the circumstance that may have led to the fire or led the result that not everyone was able to escape in time. (I discuss this in the paper that I have attached.)
2. As part of this I am suggesting that the performance of the smoke alarm system be thoroughly investigated. As strange as it may seem, this aspect is often downplayed. (I have attached a letter that I sent to the US Fire Administration highlighting possible reasons for this phenomenon.)
 - a. To fully investigate this aspect it is helpful to determine what type of fire started the tragic events of that night. While it is obviously helpful to have an exact cause it is not necessary to have an exact cause. It is only necessary that the fire be categorized as one that started in the flaming mode or started in the smoldering mode and then erupted into flame.
 - b. Despite extensive damage there may be some parts of the house, e.g. the basement, where a smoke alarm, even if it melted, could be used to help identify the type of alarm in the rest of the house. According to news reports, neighbors did report hearing alarms. It may also be helpful to interview family members who had spent time at the house and may be able to help determine if there were alarms.
 - c. By asking for information from survivors, previous contractors and other witnesses, in addition to any information obtain by step "b," it may be possible to determine the type of smoke alarm.
 - d. Once "a," "b," and "c" are determined then it is helpful to look at occupants behavior. Did they hear an alarm? If they heard an alarm, what were the smoke and heat conditions in the house at the time the alarm operated? (Note: it is possible that audibility was an issue and I will attach a study by the US Consumer Product safety Commission.)
 - e. If the alarms are determined to have operated then it raises the following questions regarding why the victims were trapped: 1) Did the fire grow so fast that the alarm were irrelevant (in which case the smoke alarm type would not matter) or 2) was it a slower growing fire that produced copious amount of smoke, thereby trapping victims, prior to the operation of the smoke alarm (in this case the extra 30 minutes typically provided by the photoelectric alarm would most likely have changed the tragic outcome.

3. If you determine that a photoelectric smoke alarm may have made a difference then I would suggest that you contact me for further suggestions. Several states in the US have mandated photoelectric alarms and I can send you information regarding these laws/regulations if you desire. I have noticed in news stories that Coroner's in Queensland have previously recommended updates to regulations to prevent future tragedies.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/coroner-calls-for-testing-overhaul-after-four-boating-deaths-20111125-1nygr.html>

I hope this information is helpful to your investigation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph M. Fleming". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'F' and 'M'.

Joseph M. Fleming
327 Main Street
Norwell, MA 02061

Firies critical of older alarms

Patrick Williams | 30th December 2011

CHANGE your smoke alarm. Don't just check it.

That is the message of the World Fire Safety Foundation in the wake of the tragic Boxing Day fire that claimed the lives of four members of the Golinski family at Tewantin.

The foundation is pushing Australians to ditch their current smoke alarms in favour of a photoelectric type that has a better track record than ionisation smoke alarms.

Former firefighter and foundation chairman Adrian Butler estimated 95% of Australian homes were fitted with ionisation alarms.

"Even the new homes are being built and having them put in," Mr Butler said. "No one wants to admit there is a problem with the ionisation ones."

It is also the official position of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service "that all residential accommodation be fitted with photoelectric smoke alarms".

Research has shown that photoelectric alarms give earlier warnings of smouldering fires than any other kind of alarm.

Neighbours who witnessed the Boxing Day blaze said they heard a smoke alarm at the time of the fire, but it has yet to be confirmed what type of smoke alarm was inside the Jacaranda Pl home.

Police investigators said the alarm may have been "fried" if it was in the same room the devastating fire ignited.

"The circumstances surrounding this fatal blaze are the subject of a coronial investigation and report," a police spokeswoman said.

"We are unable to comment further."

Noosa fire station officer Brian Riley said ionisation alarms were still for sale because they "complied with safety standards".

"People see them on the shelves in the hardware store or supermarkets and think they're doing the right thing ... without doing research," he said.

Mr Riley said photoelectric alarms were more efficient in picking up elements of combustion while ionisation alarms had limitations if a fire developed quickly.

Celebrity chef Matt Golinski struck by fire tragedy

- **BY:SARAH ELKS AND SEAN PARNELL**
- From:[The Australian](#)
- December 27, 2011 12:14PM

BADLY burned and screaming for his girls, celebrity chef Matt Golinski lay in agony on his driveway for 30 minutes before an ambulance arrived, after trying frantically to save his wife and three young daughters from the inferno destroying their home.

The 39-year-old Ready Steady Cook star is fighting for his life in a Brisbane hospital and today remained in a critical but stable condition.

Authorities have been scouring the wreckage of the family's tin and timber home at Tewantin, on the Sunshine Coast, to find the cause of the blaze.

Mr Golinski's long-time love, Rachael, their 12-year-old twin daughters, Sage and Willow, who suffered from a disability affecting their mobility, and youngest daughter Starlia, 10, died in the fire that ignited shortly before 3.30am yesterday.

The chef and family man had hosted family and close friends for Christmas dinner at the home just hours before tragedy struck. Neighbour Gary Siljac said his house shook with the force of the Golinskis' home exploding.

Mr Siljac spotted Mr Golinski outside and carried him to safety, with the help of other neighbours, but said it felt like an "eternity" before an ambulance arrived.

"He was scorched from top to bottom," he said. "There were absolutely horrific noises, screams, coming out of the house. Then he was screaming, first for his family, and then because pain became a factor."

The emergency services were alerted to the blaze about 3.30am yesterday, with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service on the scene within 10 minutes but not able to control the blaze until 4.35am. The first ambulance arrived at 3.59am. Police arrived at 3.47am and an officer had to help the attending paramedic by driving the ambulance to the hospital.

A Queensland Ambulance Service spokeswoman said the nearest unit had been dispatched to the code-one case, but there were "high operational volumes at the time" and three other units were needed elsewhere. "The QAS is mindful that the details of this tragic case will be subject to a coronial inquest," the spokeswoman said of the delay.

Other neighbours reported hearing smoke alarms and then, almost immediately, screaming from inside the home.

Mr Golinski was stabilised at Noosa Hospital before being taken to the Nambour Hospital and airlifted by helicopter to Royal Brisbane, where last night he was critical but stable in intensive care. The extent of his injuries was being assessed. Mr Golinski, who turns 40 in April, grew up on the Sunshine Coast and settled his family there in 1999 after years spent travelling with Rachael.

The twins suffered from a rare metabolic disorder, with symptoms similar to cerebral palsy.

Mrs Golinski recently paid tribute to their support network -- which helped fund the twins' literacy, speech therapy and mobility aids -- and noted how the girls became so active they no longer required extensive physiotherapy.

Yesterday, tributes flowed from friends of the family and chefs across Australia.

Friend and fellow chef Justin Miles, who worked at famed Noosa restaurant Ricky Ricardo's when Mr Golinski was head chef there, said the couple was married on the veranda of the home in the mid-2000s, with their three daughters as bridesmaids.

"He is unbelievably committed to his work and to his family and is easily the most talented chef I've ever worked with," Mr Miles said.

Formal identification of the dead has yet to be conducted.

Your guide to smoke detectors

- by: *staff writers*
- From: [The Courier-Mail](#)
- December 29, 2011 12:00AM

EVERYTHING you need to know about installing the life-saving device in your home.

1. Test them at least once a year and replace batteries which are spent or almost spent.
2. Clean each smoke alarm in the premises at least once a year using a vacuum cleaner or broom to remove debris (dust and cobwebs) that would restrict smoke entering the alarm
3. Replace the alarm before the end of its service life, or if it reaches the end of its service life, replace it immediately. Under the Australian Standard a smoke alarm should have a service life of 10 years, under normal conditions of use. Photo-electric smoke alarms are considered the best.
4. Hardwired alarms are the standard for new houses and provide a more reliable level of protection but are more expensive. Ten year Lithium battery alarms are cheaper over the long term and provide an increased level of reliability than a 1 year alarm, especially if they include a tamperproof feature.

QUEENSLAND LAWS

- Since July 1997, all new and significantly renovated homes and units have been required to have mains-powered smoke alarms installed at the time of construction or alteration.
- A more recent law inclusion also requires owners of older (pre 1997) homes and units to install and maintain smoke alarms. This law requires homes and units that do not already have working smoke alarms installed to install smoke alarms.
- At a minimum, there must be one alarm outside sleeping areas and one alarm on each level of the home.
- If you sell a property in Queensland, the vendor is required to lodge a form with the Queensland Land Registry, stating that smoke alarms are installed, and notify the purchaser. This means that checking of smoke alarm installations is part of buying and selling residences in Queensland.
- Fire Officers can investigate complaints received about residential non-compliance and prosecution may result. Currently, the maximum penalty is \$500 for failing to install and maintain smoke alarms.