

IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: COR 2011 3161

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 60(1)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Inquest into the Death of: Pearl RECHT

Delivered On: 6th December, 2012

Delivered At: Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne 3000

Hearing Dates: 6th December, 2012

Findings of: IAIN TRELOAR WEST, DEPUTY STATE CORONER

*Police Coronial Support Unit Leading Senior Constable King Taylor

I, IAIN TRELOAR WEST, Deputy State Coroner having investigated the death of PEARL RECHT

AND having held an inquest in relation to this death on 6th December, 2012

at MELBOURNE

find that the identity of the deceased was PEARL RECHT

aged 90 years

and the death occurred on 25 August, 2011

at The Alfred hospital, Commercial Road, Melbourne 3004

from:

1 (a) Type II respiratory failure in the setting of severe respiratory injury following a house fire.

in the following circumstances:

1. Pearl Recht was a 90 year old female who resided alone in a brick single storey three bedroom residence located at Unit 4/43-45 Robinson Road, Hawthorn. Mrs Recht ambulated with the aid of a wheelie walker and was affected by some hearing loss, necessitating the use of a hearing aid. Mrs Recht received "in home" support via a Community Aged Care Package funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging. This service was managed and delivered by Jewish Care, through a case manager.
2. At approximately 7.50am on the 17th August 2011, a neighbour alerted the fire brigade (MFB) to smoke billowing from Unit 4, whilst another neighbour attempted to gain entry to the premises. After opening the front door he heard Mrs Recht inside, however, the intense heat from flames within the Unit, prevented him gaining access. Shortly thereafter fire officers attended and successfully recovered Mrs Recht from the premises, with ambulance paramedics then attending to her before transferring her to the Alfred Hospital. Despite treatment in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit, Mrs Recht succumbed to the injuries sustained and died at 4.22am on the 25th August, 2011.
3. Following the fire being extinguished the premises were examined by an MFB investigator and a Victoria Police Forensic Services investigator, with no suspicious circumstances being identified. A definitive cause could not be determined due to fire damage however, it was believed the most likely cause was overheating of a toaster, or an unspecified electrical fault within the toaster.

COMMENTS

Pursuant to section 67(3) of the **Coroners Act 2008**, I make the following comments connected with the death:

1. The death of Mrs Recht is representative of an increasing number of preventable residential fire fatalities involving older people and people with disability, who receive “in home” support to assist them to live in the community. Demand for these services is high and predicted to grow as the population ages, hence there is a need to identify common risk features and to deliver an improved safety outcome for those most at risk. Work has been done in this area, with the MFB for example, developing and supervising an *Analysis of Preventable Fire Fatalities of Older People and People with Disabilities*. The study provides simple fire safety solutions for the community care sector to utilize and potentially incorporate into policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursuant to section 72(2) of the **Coroners Act 2008**, I make the following recommendations connected with the death:

1. I direct the following recommendations to agencies who fund programs who provide “in home” services to older people in Victoria, specifically the Aged Care Branch, Victorian Department of Health, the Commonwealth Department for Health and Aging and the Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs:
 - a) That the ‘Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials’, as endorsed by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authority Council, are mandated for use by community aged care providers in Victoria, through inclusion of the information into the induction processes for new community aged care workers. These materials should also be used for skills maintenance sessions/programs conducted by community aged care providers for existing workers.
 - b) That basic home fire safety is incorporated into policy and practice guidelines for assessment processes used to assess older people for “in home” services. In residences where the client is considered at greater risk due to health or lifestyle factors (as defined in Essential Knowledge: Basic Home Fire Safety, Section 2), additional smoke alarms should be installed to provide the earliest possible warning of a fire for the occupant.

I direct that a copy of this finding be distributed to the following parties for their action:

Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs (Veterans Home Care)

Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging

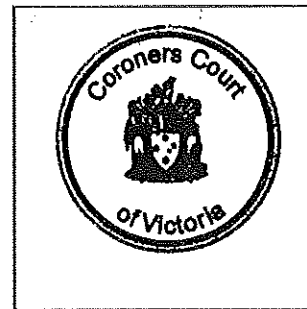
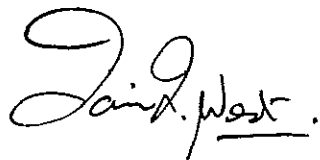
Victorian Department of Health (Aging and Aged Care Branch)

I also direct that this finding be distributed to the following parties for their information only:

Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

Country Fire Authority

Signature:



IAIN WEST
DEPUTY STATE CORONER
Date: 6th December, 2012