

Fire claims cat, apartment  
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By Neal Ross

An accidental, smoking-related fire destroyed a Sonoma apartment and claimed the life of a housecat late Thursday night.

Three engines from the Sonoma Fire Department and one from the Valley of the Moon fire district responded shortly before 10 p.m. to the Village Green Senior Apartments at 650 Fourth St. W. Firefighters found the interior ablaze, with the front windows and glass patio door literally blown out by the flames.

“When we got here, this whole room (the front of the apartment) was totally involved,” Sonoma fire Capt. Bob Norrbom said over the roar of ventilation fans. “We did save one room in the back.”

The fire, which filled the night sky with a column of acrid smoke, was brought under control within 10 minutes. Firefighters remained on the scene, shoveling smoldering pink insulation from the gutted interior and dousing “hot spots,” until nearly 11:45 p.m. An adjacent apartment sustained light smoke damage but was otherwise untouched.

Five-year Village Green resident Kathy Milbrandt was released from the scene after being treated for second-degree burns to her right thumb and first-degree burns to her right palm. A Village Green spokeswoman said Friday that the 46-year-old Milbrandt would be staying with her mother for a while.

But Milbrandt’s cat, Sarah – a popular neighborhood pet, according to bystanders – didn’t fare as well. Sonoma asst. Chief Allyn Lee hurried the limp little form out of the still-smoking ruins to a nearby fire truck, where Lee attempted for some minutes to resuscitate Sarah with an oxygen mask.

As firefighters rushed in and out of the apartment, a small, tense knot of emergency personnel crowded around the assistant chief. But despite Lee’s best efforts, Sarah – her tiny lungs filled with smoke – never regained consciousness.

Sonoma fire Chief Mike Cahill on Friday estimated the property loss at \$70,000 and contents at \$10,000. He added yesterday that a final cause could not be determined, since Milbrandt – under a doctor’s care – could not be contacted.