

# Student dies in apartment fire

By Scott Williams

A 22-year-old NIU student died Saturday morning in a fire in his Suburban Estates apartment apparently caused by "careless use of smoking materials," DeKalb County Coroner William Sullivan said.

James M. Funke, originally from Chicago, was pronounced dead at 2:40 a.m. Saturday. The cause of death was smoke inhalation, although Funke also had some first-degree burns on his body, Sullivan said.

Funke's body was found in the kitchen of his apartment at 2317 Suburban Estates. He apparently wandered there after becoming disoriented by the heavy smoke and toxic fumes produced by the burning material of his living room sofa, Sullivan said.

"We think he went in the wrong direction," he said.

The fire was contained within Funke's apartment and probably caused about \$10,000 worth of damage, Suburban Estates landlord Jim Gordon said.

No other injuries were reported.

The fire originated at the sofa and probably was caused by Funke's carelessness with a cigarette, DeKalb Fire Department Investigator Alan Berg said.

"It looks like an accidental fire," Berg said.

Berg said he assumes Funke was asleep because it was a slow-burning fire and he should have realized sooner that there was a fire. Also, Funke was wearing only a pair of shorts.

Berg Sunday completed an investigation of the fire with the DeKalb County Sheriff's office, a state fire marshal and Sullivan's office.

Funke returned to his apartment at about 1 a.m. and the fire was reported at 1:57 a.m. by a neighbor who smelled smoke, Sullivan said.

"No foul play is suspected," DeKalb County Deputy Kris Patten said.

Sullivan said he has reason to suspect that Funke was intoxicated, but that would be determined at an inquest in about 20 or 30 days.

Funke did not have a smoke alarm in his apartment, Gordon said.

A smoke alarm might have saved Funke's life because it probably would have awakened him sooner, Berg said.

Neighbors of Funke said it is negligent of Gordon not to have smoke alarms in all the apartments. Mary Twohill and Cheryl Kerins said, because of Funke's fire, they are going to install a smoke alarm in their apartment themselves.

A DeKalb ordinance requires smoke alarms to be installed in all apartment complexes, but Suburban Estates is in an unincorporated DeKalb area, where the ordinance does not apply.

Gordon said he has not installed smoke alarms because they are too expensive and residents often install alarms themselves.

"It's really not his (Gordon's) responsibility," Berg said. "People should be able to take care of themselves."

Neighbors said they did not know Funke. His roommate, Timothy Nelligan, reportedly has taken a semester off school and could not be reached.

Gordon said Funke had lived in Suburban Estates for at least two years and never caused any problems.



A charred sofa sits outside the apartment where NIU student James M. Funke died in a fire Saturday morning. The cause of death has been reported as smoke inhalation.