

Where's the love? Hate mail sent to city after report

City of New Castle gov't receives misguided anger

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"I am ashamed to be called a firefighter after I just read an article where your department is trying to bill \$28,000 for a fire."

- One message sent to the City of New Castle

The City of New Castle has been receiving hate mail this week for something it didn't do.

The mail is the result of a news report about a Henry County family that received a bill after their house burned. An Indianapolis TV station, WRTV, did a story on the family, reporting that they had been billed \$28,000 for the services involved in putting out the fire.

The story said the Fairchild family lived in New Castle and didn't mention which of Henry County's fire departments was in charge of putting out the fire.

Brian and Darline Fairchild told the station that they were shocked to receive the bill.

The report was picked up by other news outlets across the country, including one in Hawaii and another in Florida.

The Indianapolis report ran earlier this week, and soon after, the City of New Castle began receiving hate mail, even though the New Castle Fire Department had nothing to do with the billing and wasn't even in charge of putting out the fire.

One angry person wrote in an e-mail to Mayor Jim Small, "You government (expletive) just get worse !!!!!!!!!!! If you want to bill for fire services then quit charging taxes !!"

Another person wrote to the city, "I am ashamed to be called a firefighter after I just read an article where your department is trying to bill \$28,000 for a fire."

Asked about the incident, New Castle Fire Chief Jeff Murray said his department doesn't charge residents for fire response. In fact, he said it's illegal for municipalities to bill for structure fires.

"This is not something that New Castle does," Murray said.

A variety of officials said on Wednesday that the Cadiz Volunteer Fire Department was the department in charge of putting out the fire in question.

The house that burned is located just outside of Cadiz but is listed at New Castle address in the phone book.

Mark Stults, the chief of the Cadiz department, said he has no idea how the family received a bill.

He said his department's policy is to bill only insurance companies and not individuals. The department uses a billing agency to do so. And Stults said he confirmed with the billing agency that a bill was not sent to the family in question but to their insurance company.

"It's not set up to come out of a victim's pocket," Stults said.

He explained that the department receives only about \$10,000 through taxes to operate on for the year. That's not enough, Stults said. So the department charges insurance companies to get money to buy equipment, he said.

"We are just trying to get by," Stults said.

Charging for fires is something the volunteer departments can do, New Castle's chief said. It's the municipal departments that can't.