

Explosion Rips Vacant Home

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A natural gas explosion late Saturday night rocked the vacant Central Lutheran Church parsonage located at the intersection of West Rollin and North Main streets.

Edgerton volunteer firefighters and Wisconsin Power & Light Co. workers were called to the two-story home at 2 W. Rollin after an explosion was heard about 11:15 p.m.

There were no injuries reported, although firefighters found shattered glass strewn as far away as the parking lot at Gordy's IGA, which is located across North Main.

Rae Spirra, manager at the WP&L office in Edgerton, said the explosion was triggered by a buildup of natural gas in the vacant structure, which apparently originated in the basement.

He could only speculate that the gas was ignited when the basement furnace kicked in.

"The logical thing is the furnace," Spirra said. "That is the only thing that would be recycling, and there needs to be a spark to ignite the gas.

"It could have been much more serious," he added. "It could have blown the house down."

Spirra said the gas leak originated at the water heater. The culprit was a valve which failed to shut off the flow of gas when

the pilot light on the water heater went out.

"The valves are supposed to automatically shut off and not allow gas in," Spirra explained. "But because the (pilot) light was out, it continued to allow raw gas to go through.

"The valves are supposed to be 100 percent fail-safe," he added. "That is why they need to be inspected once in a while because they can fail."

Because there was no damage to the burner, WP&L representatives were convinced that the explosion occurred outside of the water heater. They also believed that the gas probably had not been building up for only a short period of time.

"If it had been a long period of time, there would not be a house standing," Spirra said. "You wouldn't think it would have been leaking for a long period of time or it would also have ignited sooner."

Although there was "little or no fire," the explosion did result in extensive damage to the house.

In addition to blowing out windows, the force of the blast also knocked plaster completely off walls on both the first and second floors. Cracks were also visible in the walls, floor and ceiling in several rooms.

The basement door had been

blown off its hinges and thrown up against a wall, while even a pillar outside the house was knocked loose from its base.

"There was a lot of damage in the house," Spirra said. "But it doesn't take much of an explosion to knock plaster off an old house."

It has been approximately a month since the Central Lutheran Church's associate pastor and his wife had moved out of the parsonage.

"We're happy there were no people in there, but if there was, they probably would have smelled the gas before there was enough gas to have an explosion," Spirra said.