



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

ROSE GILL HEARN
COMMISSIONER

80 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

Release #75-2010
nyc.gov/html/doi

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2010**

**CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI
(212) 825-5931**

**DOI ARRESTS CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY CARETAKER ON
RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT AND ARSON CHARGES**

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), announced today the arrest of a Caretaker for the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") on charges that she set fire to a mattress on the 10th floor in the Manhattanville Houses, the NYCHA housing development on West 126th Street where the defendant worked. No one was injured. DOI began its investigation after it was notified by NYCHA about allegations that a NYCHA employee may be involved in a mattress fire that occurred on September 8, 2010, at the Manhattanville Houses. The Office of New York County District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., is prosecuting the case.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "The charges in this case are alarming: the fire set in a residential apartment building by a City employee, as charged, could have ended in tragedy but for the quick response of firefighters. Anyone, including a City employee, whose intentional actions endanger the lives of others, will face arrest and prosecution. DOI will continue to work with its fellow City and law enforcement agencies to stop this kind of reckless conduct."

MIRIAM ORTIZ, 36, of Manhattan, N.Y., is charged with Reckless Endangerment in the First Degree, a class D felony, Arson in the Fourth Degree, a class E felony, and Criminal Mischief in the Fourth Degree, a class A misdemeanor. Upon conviction, a class D felony is punishable by up to seven years in prison, a class E felony by up to four years in prison and a class A misdemeanor by up to a year's incarceration.

ORTIZ began working at NYCHA in March 1999 and receives an annual salary of approximately \$39,000.

According to the criminal complaint, a mattress was found burning in an enclosed balcony on the 10th floor of a 20-floor apartment building on West 126th Street, and firefighters from the New York City Fire Department ("FDNY") responded and extinguished the fire, which charred and scalded the building wall. DOI's investigation found that ORTIZ used a lighter to ignite the mattress and then fled the scene.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked New York County District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea, and their staffs, and Fire Marshal Patrick Quinn of the FDNY, for their assistance and cooperation on this investigation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Office of the Inspector General for NYCHA, including Senior Deputy Inspector General Ralph Iannuzzi, Assistant Inspector General Suzanne Vitti, Chief Investigator Stephen Mattei and Chief Investigator John Reatz, under the direction of DOI's Inspector General for NYCHA Kelvin Jeremiah.

Assistant District Attorney Stuart Silberg of the New York County District Attorney's Office is prosecuting this case.

A criminal complaint is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.