OBION COUNTY, TN (KFVS) - Last week a fire department refused to respond to a house fire near South Fulton, Tennessee because the person living there hadn't paid the $75 fee for rural coverage.

The house burned to the ground.

Even though the fire is getting world wide attention, perhaps no group of people have more to say about this fire than the people who live in Obion County and the Cranick family.

Paulette and Gene Cranick's grandson was home when the fire started. He says he can't understand how crews can put a price on public safety.

Lance Cranick says he pleaded with them to spray some water on the house.

"I was shocked," said Cranick. "I couldn't believe it. They didn't even explain anything to my grand dad."

He says he watched as firefighters put out the flames that spread to a neighbor's field who had paid the subscription, but refused to spray a drop of water on his grandparents' home where four animals died.

Three out of eight departments in Obion County use the subscription program for rural coverage. Under that plan, firefighters only respond if you pay the fee.

"They put out the fire in the field then got in the trucks and drove off," Lance Cranick said. "It was shocking actually. Another lady, Ms. Reams, called and told them we'll pay whatever it costs to put the house out, but they wouldn't do it. I had to set here in the field and watch the house I pretty much grew up in burn to the ground."

"I called 911," homeowner Paulette Cranick said on Monday. "They said, 'We're trying to get them out"
there but they're not cooperating,' or words to that effect."

South Fulton City manager Jeff Vowell confirmed the Cranicks had not paid the fee, which has been the department's policy since 1990. Cranick said her failure to pay was an oversight.

"I've paid it many, many times," Paulette Cranick said, "I just haven't gotten around to it (this year)."

Cranick pointed out that the fire station is on the edge of town and "we don't go out that way every often."

Paulette Cranick said the fire started Wednesday, September 29, when her grand son was burning papers inside a burn barrel on the property. Cranick was unsure exactly how the grass around the barrel caught fire, but said the blaze eventually spread to her home.

"They owe my dad an apology," said Todd Cranick, Paulette and Gene's son. "What they did was immoral, unethical. Anytime you work for a fire department, an ambulance service, a policeman, you have a moral responsibility and an ethical responsibility to do what it takes to help someone in need."

"For the next house or whatever that catches on fire I don't want their house to burn down like this one did," Lance Cranick said.

"It's pitiful," Todd Cranick said. "I want to see the laws change. Something done about this. For them to have three fire trucks here and not a squirt of water, not a drop of water anywhere near Dad's house was wrong."

Obion County itself has no fire coverage. According to Hornbeak Chief, Bob Reavis, they fight fires collectively through eight rural departments. Chief Bob Reavis held a press conference to speak on fire protection issues across the county early Wednesday evening. He also addressed the fire controversy which has sparked national attention.

"My point in all this is, is that we have to go to this subscription program," Reavis said. "That's what we've been dealt. The people should understand that houses are going to burn."

South Fulton is one of the three out of eight fire departments in Obion County that works under the subscription method. Reavis said the purpose of the press conference was not to point blame, however to encourage people to get involved and let the county know what kind of protection they'd like to have. He acknowledges the current plan is not perfect and there needs to be changes.

"This isn't why I got involved in this thirty-six years ago," said Chief Reavis. "We're here to help people. I want my people to get involved."

During the press conference, the Cranick's son Todd addressed the fire chief.

"My neighbor was standing there with an open checkbook and told 'em to put it out no matter what it cost," Todd Cranick said. "My dad, an open checkbook. It's not like the money wasn't there. Seventy-five dollars versus 5 to $10,000, which would you rather have?"

"I'm on your side, brother," Reavis answered. "I'm on your side, you know and that's my point."

They say if someone would have been inside the home, they would not have stood by and watched it burn. However, speaking for Obion County, Reavis says volunteers have their hands tied when subscriptions come in to play.

"We regret that the Cranick home burned as a result of not paying a rural fire subscription," Reavis said. "Second, let me say this tragedy was not the fault of the South Fulton Fire Department or the city of South Fulton, but rather the failure, the fault was the failure of the Cranick family not to pay that subscription."

Obion County authorities say they've received threats and hate mail which the Cranick family members say they do not condone. No officials from South Fulton were at the press conference.

The Cranick family members say they are shocked by all the attention they have gotten and the donations they have received from as far away as Minnesota and Florida.