

Former fire inspector gets probation for lying about inspection of Grand Isle motel where fatal fire occurred

By [Heather Nolan, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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Former fire inspector Nunzio Marchiafava was sentenced to a year of probation for attempting to injure public records. He was convicted of falsifying records to hide his failure to inspect a Grand Isle motel where two people died in a fire in 2012.

A former fire marshal's inspector who was convicted of attempting to injure public records for trying to hide his failure to inspect a Grand Isle motel where two people died in a fire was sentenced Thursday (April 25) to one year of probation.

[Nunzio Marchiafava](#), 73, was convicted April 11 after a one-day bench trial before Criminal District Judge Paul Bonin. Marchiafava was charged with injuring public records, but Bonin convicted him of the lesser attempt charge.

He was arrested in 2013 following an investigation by the state Office of Inspector General. The investigation stemmed from a complaint from the watchdog Metropolitan Crime Commission.

Belle Brandl, 60, and Timoty Foret, 46, died in the Sept. 26, 2012, fire at the Willow Creek Apartments, a motel along Louisiana 1 in Grand Isle also known as the Rusty Pelican. Authorities said the fire started outside the door of Brandl's second-floor room. Consumed by combustible materials at the complex, the fire quickly consumed the balcony, which was Brandl and Foret's only way to escape, the fire marshal's office said at the time.

The office later said it “properly responded” to complaints of unsafe conditions before the fire.

In March 2012, six months before the fatal fire, the fire marshal's office received complaints from neighbors, who said the motel posed an “extreme, severe” fire hazard. Marchiafava, then the New Orleans district supervisor for the fire marshal's office, was assigned by his boss, Assistant State Fire Marshal Dan Wallis, to investigate.

On April 3, 2012, Marchiafava emailed Wallis, saying he visited the property the day before but was unable to enter. In that email, Marchiafava told Wallis he would return for another inspection, this time accompanied by the motel's owner and Jefferson Parish Code Enforcement.

The next month, Wallis asked Marchiafava to forward his second inspection report and any other information he had. Marchiafava replied that he had not been in contact with the Grand Isle fire chief or Jefferson Parish officials, but promised to return May 22.

The fire happened four months later.

The next day, Marchiafava sent a “special report” to Wallis by email that purported to document a May 25 visit to the motel. Marchiafava said in the email he hadn't been able to organize the joint inspection with the parish and went alone. He claimed to have traveled 180 miles roundtrip to the building in Grand Isle, according to his arrest warrant.

Marchiafava said in an interview with police he “became very worried about the situation” after the fire and destroyed documents that showed he was in New Orleans on the day he was supposed to have inspected the motel.

He retired from the fire marshal's office in March 2013.

As part of his sentence, Bonin ordered Marchiafava to pay \$100 to the district attorney's office to cover the witness costs and \$100 to the

Louisiana Fire Marshal's Office.

Assistant District Attorneys Daniel Smart and Jay Meyers prosecuted the case.