

Shacks too close to allow firemen in

Many lose everything to raging fire and theft by neighbours

VINCENT LALI

Thembakazi Fetume lost the R3,000 she had saved for a journey to her mother's grave in the Eastern Cape in a fire that destroyed 26 shacks in Khayelitsha, Western Cape on Monday.

Fetume said she had saved the money through a stokvel and been paid out in October.

"I kept the money so I could visit my mother's grave in Mount Fletcher during the Christmas holiday.

"I wanted to sit next to her grave and talk to her to come to terms with her death," she said as she wiped away tears.

Over 100 shack dwellers were left homeless by a fire in Gadini informal settlement, Khayelitsha, on Monday afternoon.

Shack dwellers scrambled to

move valuables such as TVs, fridges and DVDs.

Firefighters arrived quickly but battled to enter Gadini, where the shacks are closely clustered together. The wind hampered their attempts to extinguish the fire.

Vuyokazi Tyam said the fire had started in a locked shack whose owner was at work.

Tyam said she didn't blame the firefighters for failing to save the shacks from the blaze.

"The fire spun as it went up and prevented the poor firefighters from coming closer to the shacks and putting it out," she said.

She had been planning to spend Christmas with her family in Dutywa in the Eastern Cape.

"The fire burned my R5,000, which I set aside to spend at home and ruined my Christmas plans," said Tyam. She had also lost the insulin which she needs

for her diabetes.

Tyam is unemployed as her contract with a local Expanded Public Works Programme project ended in January.

Community leaders sent out an appeal on Radio Zibonele for food and clothing for the victims of the fire.

Community leader Ntombi Feya said she wanted the City of Cape Town to move some of the fire victims elsewhere.

"Firefighters could not enter Gadini because the shacks had been built too close to each other," she said.

Disaster risk management centre spokesperson Charlotte Powell said the City had informed the SA Social Security Agency for it to provide relief, and the City would issue starter kits for residents whose homes had been destroyed.

This article was first published by GroundUp