

Jack Cassidy dies in fire; cigarette probable cause

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A smoldering cigarette may have sparked the fire that killed actor-singer Jack Cassidy, sweeping his penthouse apartment after a party and charring his body beyond recognition, a fire official says.

The body was discovered early Sunday in the West Hollywood apartment belonging to the dimpled, silver-haired performer. It was several hours before the coroner's office said that dental charts had confirmed the victim was Cassidy, 49, father of onetime teen-age singing idol David Cassidy and ex-husband of actress-singer Shirley Jones.

An autopsy was scheduled for today, but the spokesman said there was no evidence to indicate anything but an accidental death.

Investigators said his fourth-floor apartment was littered with cigarette butts apparently left from a Saturday night party.

County Fire Department Battalion Chief Rod Smith said Cassidy was known to be a heavy smoker and said that the fire might have started from an unextinguished cigarette.

Sheriff's Deputy Stuart Heller, 28, who was trying to evacuate other residents from the apartment complex, was overcome by smoke and was reported in serious condition at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Cassidy, a singer, comedian and dramatic actor, starred on Broadway and in movies and made frequent television appearances. Most recently, he played John Barrymore in the movie "W.C. Fields and Me."

In 1964, he won a Tony Award for his performance in the Broadway musical "She Loves Me." Television specials in which he appeared included "The Andersonville Trial," "The Boston Spy Party," "High Button Shoes" and "George M!"

David Cassidy, who starred in the television series "The Partridge Family," was his son by actress Evelyn Ward. Jack Cassidy later married and had three children by actress Shirley Jones, who also starred in the series. Their marriage ended in divorce in 1975.

Born in New York City, Cassidy sang as a youth and made his Broadway debut at 16 in the musical "Something for the Boys."