

October Safety Theme: The Month of October Focuses On Fire Prevention

S.C. State Fire Marshal John Reich, joins the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association and other state and national organizations to draw attention to the 2008 Fire Prevention Week theme: "Prevent Home Fires!"

Fire Prevention Week is October 5 – 11, but many organizations are expanding these efforts by declaring the month of October as a time to focus on home fire safety.

"One of the biggest threats to any residence, and to the people who live there, is fire." **State Fire Marshal John Reich said** "Ironically, fires in homes are the least 'considered' threat by homeowners. This alone, is one of the major reasons the United States suffers the highest fire death rate in the industrialized world." This year's theme focuses on preventing fires in the home – where people spend most of their time and where 80% of fire deaths occur. The leading causes of fires in homes are cooking, heating equipment and electrical. People can protect themselves from fire by taking some basic safety precautions:

Cooking Safety

- Pay particular attention while cooking, especially when using oils and grease. Cooking appliances should be kept clean of grease build-up, which can easily ignite. Applying a lid to a small grease fire is usually the most effective and safest method of controlling it. Trying to carry a pan that's on fire is extremely dangerous because it can ignite clothes or spill, causing severe burns. If the fire is inside your oven, turn off the heat and leave the door closed to cut off the fire's air supply. Young children should be kept away from cooking appliances to prevent any mishaps. It's always a good idea to use back burners when possible and keep pot handles turned to the inside so they won't be pulled or knocked over. Check stoves and other appliances before going to bed or leaving your home to make sure that the units are left in the "off" position.

Heating Safety

- Electric heaters should have automatic safety switches to turn them off if tipped over. They also should carry the UL-approval label. Be sure to check cords before plugging in the heater. If frayed, worn or broken, do not use. Either replace the heater or have an electrician replace the cord. Just putting tape on the cord is not enough to prevent overheating and fire. Never use

extension cords with portable heaters. To supply a heater with a small, ordinary household extension cord will cause the cord to overheat and burn. Keep all materials that can burn at least 36 inches away from the unit.

- Many kerosene heater fires are attributed to the misuse or abuse of the devices. Get started on the right foot by purchasing a heater that carries the UL label. This means it has been tested for safety. Be sure it has an automatic safety switch to shut it off if it's tipped over. An automatic starter eliminates the need for matches and makes for safer starts. A fuel gauge will help ensure you do not overfill the heater. A safety grill on the front can prevent accidental contact burns. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembly. Use only crystal-clear 1K kerosene; never use a yellow or contaminated kerosene or any other fuel. Fill it only outside. Store kerosene outside in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid that is clearly marked for kerosene. When using kerosene heaters, be sure the room is well ventilated. Opening a door to an adjoining room or area may be enough. Better yet, open a window in the room.
- Wood stoves and other wood-burning devices are popular heating systems. Before investing in one for your home, think as much about safety as you will about the ease of use, efficiency and appearance. Have your stove installed by a professional. Keep a tight-fitting screen or glass doors in front of the stove or fireplace at all times. Special retaining screens can keep children and pets away from wood stoves and prevent burns. Dispose of ashes in metal containers, never in paper bags, cardboard boxes or plastic wastebaskets. Wet ashes down to cool them thoroughly. Remember, ashes can retain enough heat to cause a fire for several days, so take no chances. Although these tips should help prevent a fire, know the signs of danger. Loud roars, sucking sounds and shaking pipes mean trouble and danger. If you hear these sounds, get everyone out of the house. Quickly shut off the fire's air supply by closing any air-intake vents in the firebox. Close the damper. Call the fire department from a nearby phone.

Electrical Safety

- According to the NFPA, electrical distribution and lighting equipment is involved in 20,800 home fires per year. To help prevent electrical fires, frayed cords should be replaced or repaired on all electrical devices; extension cords should not cross doorways or be placed under carpets or rugs; ground fault circuit interrupter electrical outlets should be installed in kitchens,

bathrooms, outdoor areas, basements and garages; and overloading receptacles should be avoided.

- Working smoke alarms should be a priority at any time of year. This is a great time to test your alarms to make sure they are working. Having working smoke alarms and a prepared and practiced emergency escape plan will help insure survival in a home fire.
- “Many communities in the United States are taking safety a step further by installing residential sprinkler systems, Reich said. “Fire sprinklers and smoke alarms increase your chances of surviving a fire to 82%. An added benefit is that fire sprinklers also protect the lives of firefighters. The majority of firefighter injuries and deaths occur fighting residential fires.”.