

Statewide Security Security News

30 Year Anniversary

Fire Safety: by Jim O'Donnell

October is National Fire Prevention month. October was selected to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire, the tragic 1871 conflagration that killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres.

A lot has changed in the past 137 years but unfortunately fires continue to occur and people are still hurt or killed. According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) statistics in 2007 there were 1,557,500 fires reported in the United States. Of those fires, 530,500 were structure fires, causing 3,000 civilian deaths, 15,350 civilian injuries, and \$10.6 billion in property damage. This is far too high and deaths regularly occur because people refuse to install or maintain functional fire detection equipment. In our view, nothing we do is more important for our clients than providing high-quality fire detection.

We have fairly well eliminated fire deaths at work because most of our offices, schools, warehouses and manufacturing facilities have fire sprinklers. Many of the new homes in which we install alarms have fire sprinklers as well. There have been no residential fire deaths in the U.S. in the past 25 years in homes equipped with fire sprinklers. We do not sell fire sprinkler systems but know of no better way to protect people and assets than having a good sprinkler system. We recommend them highly and many fire prevention agencies are requiring them in new structures.

There are a number of things homeowners can do to reduce the risk of having a fire in their home and even more they can do to alert them if there is a fire. It's important to keep your home in good working order, don't over load electrical circuits, check appliances regularly to make sure they are working properly and that the electrical cords are in good condition. Cooking fires are the #1 cause of home fires and home fire injuries. Nearly all cooking equipment fires start with the ignition of food, other cooking materials (e.g., grease, cooking oil), or other items nor-

mally found or installed in a kitchen. High heat generators like coffee machines have a history of starting kitchen fires. Unplug them when not in use. Dryer fires are very common and are responsible for 15,500 fires annually. Make sure to clean out the lint filter after each use and periodically blow out the dryer duct venting. Candles are another common cause of home fires. While they are beautiful and

add a wonderful warmth to a dinner party or evening, they need to be placed away from anything flammable, in a sturdy and safe container, and they need to be extinguished before you leave the room.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors:

Often called the silent killer, it is an invisible odorless, colorless gas created when fuels burn incompletely. In the home, heating and cooking equipment that burn fuel are potential sources of carbon monoxide. Install Carbon Monoxide alarms (labeled by a recognized laboratory like Underwriter's Lab-U.L.) inside your home to provide early warn-

ing of accumulating CO. The alarms should be installed in a central location outside each separate sleeping area. If bedrooms are spaced apart, each area will need a CO detector. We often find that natural gas-forced air heaters have cracked heat exchangers if they are more than 10 years old. These cracks allow carbon monoxide gas to infiltrate the whole house.

Smoke Detectors:

Modern smoke alarms have been around since the 1970's and have statistically reduced the number of deaths. However not only is it important to have a smoke detector but also to have one that is working properly. Technology is changing and improving the quality of smoke detectors. Few of our clients have battery-only smoke detectors. Most all 120 volt smoke detectors have a 9 volt backup battery that should be replaced yearly. All smoke detectors have a usable lifespan, typically 10 to 15 years and then they should be replaced. The two most commonly employed smoke detectors are ionization and photoelectric smoke detectors. Ionization smoke detectors generally are more reactive to

While the Great Chicago Fire was the best-known blaze to start during this fiery two-day stretch, it wasn't the biggest. That distinction goes to the Peshtigo Fire, the most devastating forest fire in American history. The fire, which also occurred on October 8th, 1871, roared through Northeast Wisconsin, burning down 16 towns, killing 1,152 people, and scorching 1.2 million acres before it ended.

Historical accounts of the fire say that the blaze began when several railroad workers clearing land for tracks unintentionally started a brush fire. Before long, the fast-moving flames were whipping through the area 'like a tornado,' some survivors said. It was the small town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin that suffered the worst damage. Within an hour, the entire town had been destroyed.

flaming fires and photoelectric smoke detectors are typically more responsive to fires that begin with a long period of smoldering. Have multiple smoke detectors throughout the house in all sleeping rooms and the egress pathways out of the house in a fire. Most systems that Statewide installs have smoke detectors with battery back up, point ID and offsite communication to our U.L. approved central station. Heat, particulate matter and carbon monoxide are all products of combustion and Bosch makes detectors that require all three to be present to validate an alarm. Bosch also makes a completely flush mounted ceiling detector for those wanting aesthetically low visibility detectors.

Heat Sensors: These are similar in size and appearance to a smoke detector. When the air beneath the detector reaches a specific temperature, it sets off the alarm. Heat sensors can be very beneficial in garages, basements, laundries, kitchens, crawl spaces and attics because they can tolerate dusty or smoky (kitchen) environments where smoke detectors would generate nuisance alarms.

Voice Notification: In addition to your smoke alarm alerting you to a fire, you can also benefit from a voice notification system that lets you know what the problem is. When we awaken sleepers, the occupants previously only heard a loud alarm noise but did not know whether it was a fire or intrusion alarm. We now regularly employ a voice notification driver that says "Fire, Fire, exit now" or if there was an intruder in your home, the voice notification would say "intruder, intruder, leave immediately." Knowing what the alarm is will help you know how to respond as you wake up. For those of you with children in the home, many studies have shown that children will sleep through a fire alarm beeper, but they are less likely to sleep through a voice telling them that there is a fire and to get out.

Fire Extinguishers: For home use select a multi-purpose extinguisher that is large enough to put out a small fire but is light enough to be handled easily. Evacuate the home, call 911 and only then attempt to put out a fire. I recommend that at some point, all children and adults have a chance to operate a fire extinguisher as a training exercise. The cost to replace one is around \$20.00, a small expense in the grand scheme of things.

Practice Fire Safety Drills: Fires can happen at all hours of the day or night when you are unprepared. Having a plan will help you and your family take action quickly and not waste valuable time trying to coordinate and locate everyone to exit. It is important to practice with everyone in the house, even if you think they should already know what to do. Have a muster location where everyone joins up so you can do a head count. That might be the pool area or the front lawn or at a neighbor's house.

My feeling is that under the best circumstances the parent or homeowner is responsible to collect children and guests and guide them out of the house. This eliminates wondering if everyone got out alive. That may not always be possi-

The 2007 U.S. fire loss clock

- A fire department responded to a fire every 20 seconds.
- One structure fire was reported every 59 seconds.
- One home structure fire was reported every 79 seconds
- One civilian fire injury was reported every 30 minutes.
- One civilian fire death occurred every 2 hrs. and 33 minutes.
- One outside fire was reported every 41 seconds.
- One vehicle fire was reported every 122 seconds.

ble given the particular circumstances of a fire's origin and intensity.

Chain Ladders: Children and adults should have chain ladders that will allow escape from upper floor sleeping rooms. Kids can have fun practicing using the ladders. Home Depot, Lowes and other hardware stores sell them.

Pets: Our pets can become surrogate children once our real kids move away. They are easily frightened by fire or smoke and we have a responsibility to collect them on our way out. Cats will crawl under beds and will not be cooperative. It is best to have a crate with a door or even a pillow case available to put them in before leaving the home. Dogs will be more likely to awaken you in a fire, particularly since dogs are pack animals and their pack is the family. If you are having a problem controlling a dog, use a phone cord or a computer network cable to create a makeshift leash so you can guide the dog out of the house. Secure them upon leaving so they don't run off and get hurt.

Valuables: Is there any one item in your home worth dying for? Family and pets are certainly worth retrieving, but we almost all have insurance and while losing a home is traumatic, you are still alive. If you can easily get to something you desperately need, you need to weigh the risk vs. the benefit. Decide now that in general, you are NOT going back into the house if all family members and pets are accounted for.

Testing: Our clients are NOT testing their detection systems enough. Testing is the only practical way to determine that these devices essential to your home, are working properly. Call us out to have us clean and test your detectors at least annually, you can do more frequent tests.

Insurance: If you have a good insurance agency like ours, (Todd Hall at Bainbridge Insurance (206-842-2644), your agent will help get you a replacement vehicle, a hotel room, immediate expense money and assistance through the rebuilding process. Ask your agent what you should expect from the agency in terms of immediate and extended assistance after you have had a devastating fire.

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