

# Everyone Goes Home “SAFE”!

## October – National Fire Prevention Month



October is **National Fire Prevention Month**, a time when we should all be aware of ways to help learn fire safety and prevention. Most Americans underestimate their risk for fire, and many either lack emergency response plans – or fail to practice them with fire drills. Don't let complacency lessen the attention you give to being prepared. Now is the time to check batteries in smoke detectors, inspect your fire extinguishers, and review your emergency response plans with your families.

Annual observances like National Fire Prevention Week and National Fire Prevention Month are excellent opportunities to focus on fire hazards – but we should all practice fire safety every day—at home, at work and at play.

### How it started:

Fire Prevention Week was established 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. The fire began on October 8, but continued into and did most of its damage on October 9, 1871.

According to popular legend, the fire broke out after a cow - belonging to Mrs. Catherine O'Leary - kicked over a lamp, setting first the barn, then the whole city on fire. Chances are you've heard some version of this story yourself; people have been blaming the Great Chicago Fire on the cow and Mrs. O'Leary, for more than 130 years. But recent research

by Chicago historian Robert Cromie has helped to debunk this version of events.

### The “Moo” myth:

Like any good story, the “case of the cow” has some truth to it. The great fire almost certainly started near the barn where Mrs. O'Leary kept her five milking cows. But there is no proof that O'Leary was in the barn when the fire broke out - or that a jumpy cow sparked the blaze. Mrs. O'Leary herself swore that she'd been in bed early that night, and that the cows were also tucked in for the evening.

But if a cow wasn't to blame for the huge fire, what was? Over the years, journalists and historians have offered plenty of theories. Some blamed the blaze on a couple of neighborhood boys who were near the barn sneaking cigarettes. Others believed that a neighbor of the O'Leary's may have started the fire. Some people have speculated that a fiery meteorite may have fallen to earth on October 8, starting several fires that day - in Michigan and Wisconsin, as well as in Chicago.

Those who survived the Chicago fire never forgot what they'd been through; the blaze produced countless tales of bravery and heroism. But the fires also changed the way that firefighters and public officials thought about fire safety. On the 40th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire, the Fire Marshals Association of North America (today known as the International Fire Marshals Association), decided that the anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire should henceforth be observed not with festivities, but in a way that

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would keep the public informed about the importance of fire prevention. The commemoration grew incrementally official over the years.

In 1920, President Woodrow Wilson issued the first National Fire Prevention Day proclamation, and since 1922, Fire Prevention Week has been observed on the Sunday through Saturday period in which October 9 falls. According to the National Archives and Records Administration's Library Information Center, Fire Prevention Week is the longest running public health and safety observance on record. The President of the United States has signed a proclamation proclaiming a national observance during that week every year since 1925.

## Fire Facts:

- In 2008, U.S. fire departments responded to 386,500 home fires. These fires killed 2,755 civilians. Eighty-three percent of all fire deaths resulted from home fires.
- Almost two-thirds of reported home fire deaths in 2003-2006 resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.
- About 1/3 of home fires and deaths happened in the months of December, January and February.
- Cooking continues to be the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries.
- Smoking materials caused one of every four home fire deaths.



## Cooking:



- Cooking is the leading cause of home fires, accounting for 40% of reported home fires and 36% of related injuries.
- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of cooking fires.
- Twelve percent of the fires occurred when something that could catch fire was too close to the equipment.

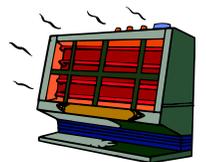
## Smoking:

- Smoking materials (i.e., cigarettes, cigars, pipes, etc.) are the leading cause of fire deaths (roughly one in four) in the United States.
- The most common items first ignited in home smoking-material fire deaths were upholstered furniture and mattresses or bedding.
- One out of four victims of fatal smoking-related fires is not the smoker whose cigarette started the fire.



## Heating:

- Space heaters result in far more fires and losses than central heating devices and have higher risks relative to usage.
- Fixed or portable space heaters were involved in 4% of the home fires and 17% of the home fire deaths.
- Most of the space heater fires were caused by the space heater being too close to things that could burn.



## Smoke Alarms:

- Smoke alarms that are properly installed and maintained play a vital role in reducing fire deaths and injuries. Having a working





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smoke alarm cuts the chances of dying in a reported fire in half.

- A 2008 U.S. telephone survey found that 96% of U.S. households had at least one smoke alarm, yet in 2003-2006, no smoke alarms were present or none operated in two out of five (41%) of the reported home fires.
- No smoke alarms were present in 40% of the home fire deaths.
- In more than half of the reported home fires in which the smoke alarms were present but did not operate, batteries were missing or disconnected.

Nuisance alarms were the leading reason for disconnected smoke alarms.

## Home Escape Planning:

- According to an NFPA survey, only one in four Americans have actually developed and practiced a **home escape plan** to ensure they could escape quickly and safely.
- While 66% of Americans have an escape plan in case of a fire, only 35% of those have practiced it

