

A p a r t m e n t

SAFETY



NOTES

SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT


APRIL 2010

What's Cooking?

We know that we cook because we like to eat! But we may not be aware that cooking is also the # 1 cause of residential fires and home injuries across the U.S. Fire departments will respond to more than 150,000 cooking related fires this year and about 500 people will predictably lose their lives. Property damage will total at least \$700 million.

There are a number of things that apartment managers can do to reduce the risk of their tenants and buildings becoming a kitchen fire statistic.

Check on the status of the smoke detectors in every unit. Make sure that every tenant has working smoke detectors. While that seems so obvious, we know there are many residential units throughout Spokane today where batteries have been removed from detectors because of annoying nuisance alarms caused by steam from the kitchen. One simple fix is to exchange the ionization detector for a **photoelectric** one (that is less likely to sound a false alarm). Ionization detectors should never be installed closer than 20 feet from any kitchen or bathroom.

Encourage tenants to use a “timer EVERY time” they cook. If there isn't a timer built into the stove, it may be a good investment to keep a supply of inexpensive timers on hand for tenants to purchase when they rent a unit or to give as safe-cooking “gift-reminders”. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), unattended cooking accounts for about 60% of range or stovetop fires, 77% of cooking-fire injuries and 88% of cooking related deaths. 

Remind tenants how to best extinguish a kitchen grease fire by putting a lid over the pan and turning off the heat.

Recommend that tenants always keep a lid and a box of baking soda handy whenever they cook with grease. While your older tenants may be aware of this simple information, many teen and young adult cooks have no idea how to extinguish a grease fire and may even reach for water!

Keep grills a safe distance from siding, eaves, wooden decks and overhanging branches. Although grills account for only a small portion of cooking-related fires, propane grills on the decks of multi-family residences can dramatically accelerate any fire that starts on the exterior of a building.

Investigate new technology that addresses the problem of cooking fires. If you have tenants who are part of the “higher-risk-for-cooking- fire” groups of college students or senior citizens, you will be interested to learn more about the CookStop device that monitors movement in the kitchen and shuts off the stove when the cook leaves the room or falls asleep. You can learn more at www.cookstop.com.

On a related note, Spokane Fire Department Prevention personnel had the opportunity to witness the effectiveness of the Safe-T-element™ at a 2009 presentation in Spokane. A pot of water was kept boiling on a hot plate fitted with Safe-T-elements. A piece of ordinary paper placed on the element and under the pot of water was slightly scorched after several hours, but was not burned. The Safe-T-element™ replaces the regular element on stovetops. It is more energy-efficient than a regular burner because it allows more even warming at a lower temperature. It actually prevents stovetop fires because it automatically shuts the stove off when temperatures reach a maximum of 350°C or 662°F. (Oil ignites at 370°C or 698°F.) For more information on how the U.S. Navy has studied the effectiveness of this device on base housing, go to www.wsafc.org/Lists/NewsArticles/DispForm.aspx?ID=2.

Studies conducted by the NFPA and US Fire Administration show that:

- *Unattended cooking is the single leading factor contributing to home fires.*
- *Males face disproportionate risk of a cooking fire injury relative to the amount of cooking they do.*
- *More than 50% of home cooking injuries occur when people try to fight the fire themselves.*
- *Although gas grills are used about 1.5 times as often as charcoal grills, they are involved in 5 times as many fires.*
- *More than one-third of residential cooking-fire fatalities occurred while the victims were sleeping.*

You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting Jan Doherty at jdoherty@spokanefire.org or by calling 625-7058.



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