

# A p a r t m e n t

## SAFETY NOTES



SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT

NOVEMBER 2010



### Where there's smoke...

While unattended cooking remains the #1 cause of home fires, careless smoking continues to be the #1 cause of fire death in the U.S.

This is true despite the decreased number of smokers since 1980 and improvements in flammability standards for upholstered furniture and mattresses in recent years.

Fire risk indicators from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) show that the risk of dying in a residential structure fire caused by smoking materials rises with age. Older residents are more likely to be on medications that can cause drowsiness and be less likely to trek outside the building whenever they want to smoke.

Adults with respiratory problems who are on medical oxygen and still smoking present a particular hazard to themselves, to the other tenants in their building and to responding firefighters. **There is no safe way to smoke if you are using medical oxygen.** Even if the tank is shut off, the fire danger remains because of

increased oxygen concentrations that absorb into the person's clothing, hair, bedding or furniture and near the connecting tubes. Where an individual indicates by statement or action they intend to continue smoking while using medical oxygen, some physicians may refuse to prescribe the oxygen because the fire and burn risk outweighs the benefit of therapy. Smokers on oxygen often suffer extreme burns or die from the immediate contact with oxygen-enriched flame. At a minimum, there should be a general policy in all rental housing that "No person can smoke in an apartment unit where medical oxygen is used."

More fire losses result from careless smokers than from smokers on medical oxygen. Fire risks increase whenever smoke detectors have been disabled, when tenants mix smoking with alcohol or drugs, or when the smoker is sleepy. Current statistics from the NFPA show that 40% of the persons who died in home smoking-material fires were sleeping at the time of the fire. Large apartment fires in the Spokane area have also been caused by smokers discarding cigarette butts in potted plants. Potting soil is not "dirt": it contains combustible organic material.

It is helpful for apartment managers to link with multiple resources in the community to better address the problems associated with smoking in multi-family residential units. Since more than 85% of adults in



Washington State do NOT smoke and secondhand smoke seeps into neighboring units, many apartments are now implementing smoke-free policies. Studies have indicated that as much as 60% of the air in an apartment unit comes from neighboring units. In addition to the health benefits for all tenants, smoke-free units are much less expensive to clean when vacated. For additional information on smoke-free apartments and resources to help smokers successfully quit nicotine, call Spokane Regional Health District at 324-1553 or check out their Tobacco Program at [www.srhd.org](http://www.srhd.org). This site can link you to the American Lung Association's Smokefree Housing program that gives property owners the ability to list smokefree rental units free of charge.

### November Firesafety Dates:

**11/7/10 Daylight Savings Time ends** with the reminder to "Change your Clock, Change your Battery". Check the back label on your detectors to find the exact date of manufacture. Replace detectors that are 10 years old. Aim to have a mix of ionization and photoelectric smoke detectors in each rental unit in order to provide full protection for either quick-burning or smoldering fires.

**11/18/10 The Great American Smokeout** provides encouragement to help smokers start a new and smokefree day. Check out the cost calculator at [www.ucanquit2.org](http://www.ucanquit2.org) to see how a pack-a-day adds up to \$2400 a year. Another incentive to quit smoking!

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

Access this edition of Apartment Safety Notes as well as back issues at [www.spokanefire.org](http://www.spokanefire.org) under "Prevention".

## Recommendations from Spokane Fire Department:

- If you smoke, smoke outside.
- Never smoke in a room with medical oxygen.
- Be alert. Set a timer if necessary.
- Use firesafe smoking receptacles made of noncombustible material with a tight-fitting lid.
- Use deep and wide ashtrays placed on sturdy tables and empty/clean them frequently.
- Keep lighters and matches out of the sight and reach of kids.
- Douse cigarettes in water before discarding them.
- Check under furniture cushions and on carpets for smoldering cigarettes.
- Install photoelectric smoke alarms because they are faster at detecting the slow-burning, smoldering fires often caused by cigarettes.



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