

A p a r t m e n t

SAFETY



NOTES

SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT

May 2012



Spring Cleaning!

It's the time of year to get rid of some winter storage and day-to-day collections that so quickly can turn to clutter. Most people have a few things to tidy up in their living space. However, a few people have a real problem discarding anything. In extreme cases, they can create a fire hazard for themselves, their neighbors and responding firefighters.

The firefighter adage that "a clean house never has a bad fire" may not always be true! But the risks associated with persons who hoard all manner of useful and useless materials have become more apparent after a number of deadly fires in the U.S., Canada and Australia.

A recent study indicated that between 3% and 5% of the population are compulsive hoarders. That translates to about 15 million Americans. An Australian study found that hoarding fires were more likely to spread beyond the room of origin because of the large fuel load. They required more than twice the average number of fire apparatus and firefighters. They caused

about 8 times as much damage. And only 26% of hoarding households had working smoke alarms in contrast to the Australian average of 66%. Although a similar study has not yet been done in the U.S., it is fair to say that results would be comparable.

Fortunately, most tenants have a much shorter spring clean-up list! Yet it is still important for apartment managers to stay alert to households that may need some specific reminders, outside assistance and compassion to keep their space firesafe for all concerned.



Arson Awareness Month

"Prevent Youth Fire-setting" is the theme of the 2012 national Arson Awareness campaign. It is important to remember that there must be malicious intent for a purposely set fire to be considered arson. Yet it is also important to know that youth account for about 50% of arson arrests each year in the U.S.

During the first week of May, five teens between the ages of 13 and 17 were arrested in Lacey, WA for a string of arsons that



targeted homes under construction. The current damage estimate is \$500,000.

Here are some simple actions that apartment managers can take to reduce arson risks:

- Maintain good lighting along the outside perimeter of buildings.
- Dispose of cardboard containers or dry shrubs that could be quickly and inconspicuously lit.
- Never allow tenants to stash lighters outside for their smoking convenience since kids will also know where to find them.
- Be alert to signs that young teens are misusing flammables on the property such as quantities of aerosol cans containing Axe body spray, hairspray or spray paint.
- Keep gasoline in locked sheds.
- Trim bushes and shrubs away from buildings to discourage easy targets for hidden fire-setting.

In addition to these tips, let parents know that kids who use fire can become involved in the Spokane Fire Department's FIRE-STOPPERS program. This provides a means of intervening in "fireplay" and educating children in an age-appropriate way about the potential danger of fire. There is no cost for this service.

Fire issues differ according to a child's age and their capacity to understand what fire can do. Preschoolers with access to matches and lighters are at a higher risk for accidentally starting a fire that gets out of control. Since they don't understand the dynamics of fire, property loss can often be substantial. Boys tend to misuse fire at a rate of 9 to 1 over girls. Both males and females in grades 5 to 10 are more apt to experience the unintended consequences of fires and burns related to the use of flammable liquids, cigarettes and fireworks.

If you have concerns about children using fire in or near your apartments, please call FIRE-STOPPERS at 625-7058 for more information.

Total Recall of Gel Fuels

The National Fire Protection Association and Consumer Product Safety Commission have warned the public to stop using ALL brands of pourable gel fuels intended for outdoor decorative lighting devices and ceramic firepots.



Gel fuel can ignite unexpectedly and splatter onto people and nearby objects when it is poured into a warm firepot. There have been at least two deaths and multiple third degree burn injuries to date. The burns are difficult to extinguish because the gel sticks to skin and clothing. For additional information, go to www.cpsc.gov.

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 (509)625-7058.



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