

S A F E T Y N O T E S

November 2013



WINTER AROUND THE CORNER

November hopefully provides us with a bit more time to prepare for the inevitable onslaught of winter. Spokane Fire Department has a few safety arenas for you to consider this month.

Smoke Detector Protection: The first Sunday of November marks the official change from Daylight Savings. While turning time **back** one hour, fire departments across the nation ask every household to check on the condition of their smoke detectors. More than simply following the slogan of “Change your Clock / Change your Battery”, we hope that someone in every household is knowledgeable about their smoke detectors. Are the detectors hardwired with battery back-up or simply battery-operated? Are the batteries 9-volt alkaline that need to be replaced at least once a year or longer-lasting lithium ones that should last up to 10 years? Does the date of manufacture on the detector’s back label indicate the unit is less than 10 years old? Have batteries been taken out of ionization detectors because of annoying nuisance alarms from cooking or shower steam? Is there at least one photoelectric detector on each level of the house or apartment? Does someone test the detectors on the first day of every month to make sure the batteries are connected?



Heating Precautions:

As November days grow colder and tenants rely more on supplementary heating sources, everyone should be alert to the potential problems associated with fireplaces, space heaters, and baseboard heaters. Heating equipment is the leading cause of residential fires between November and February.

Lease agreements generally indicate whether landlords or tenants are responsible for providing professional chimney sweep services annually when fireplaces are used on a regular basis. Cleaning out the flammable creosote deposits and inspecting for

cracks or blockages can prevent rooftop fires and carbon monoxide poisoning. Tenants should be reminded of the importance of always using seasoned or dried firewood to reduce creosote buildup.

With limited space in many apartments, tenants may be tempted to place furniture too close to baseboard heaters. Any type of combustible material (e.g. curtains, upholstery, bedspreads, and stuffed animals) should be kept at least 12 inches away from baseboard heaters.

Space heaters present a greater danger for home heating fires when tenants forget the basics of heater safety: (a) never plug heaters into an extension cord or power strip; (b) keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from the heater; and (c) turn heaters completely off when going to sleep or leaving the apartment. Pamphlets on space heater safety are available by contacting Jan at jdoherty@spokanefire.org

Holiday Cooking:

As predictable as the traditional turkey, cooking fires will be the cause of most home fires this Thanksgiving. Cooks who are distracted from watching the stove are the main problem. Encourage folks to keep a pan lid handy whenever they are cooking with grease or oil so they can quickly smother unwanted flames. If the stoves in your units do not have built-in timers, you may want to consider a small holiday gift of a timer for your residents. Turning on a timer every time the stove is turned on will prevent many kitchen fires. There is a huge trade-off between the cost of a timer and the cost of a fire!

Holiday Decorating:

Many Spokane residents will trim their Christmas tree and home before the end of this month. Before anyone plugs in more lights or appliances, please check out the new recall notice at cpsc.gov on 15 million APC surge protectors that are a fire hazard. (We just found about two dozen here at Fire Station #1!) Additional holiday reminders include the annual “nevers”, i.e. block an exit with trees or decorations, use interior extension cords on exterior lights, or link more than three strands of small lights or 50 larger bulb lights on one extension cord. The “always” rules include maintaining the correct water level on fresh trees, keeping trees and decorations at least three feet away from any heat source, and locking matches and lighters safely away from children.



The Spokane Fire Department “wish list” includes everyone using flameless, battery-operated candles instead of the open flame ones!

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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