

November, 2014



**Cooking** mishaps remain at the top of the list of residential fire causes in the U.S. Not surprisingly, Thanksgiving ranks as the single day of the year marked by the most kitchen fires requiring a fire department response. Fire departments use “unattended cooking” to mean anything from the cook getting distracted or falling asleep while the stove is turned on to the cook actually leaving the house with the oven still on!

Simple reminders such as using a kitchen timer every time the stove is turned on or carrying a potholder reminder whenever the cook momentarily leaves the kitchen can cut down on some kitchen variations of unattended cooking.

Another predictable type of fire ruining this Thanksgiving holiday for some families will result from the use of outdoor turkey fryers. It is important for those who prefer this type of cooking to know the following three facts:

- (1) UL (Underwriters Laboratories) does not certify the safety of any outdoor turkey fryer because they lack thermostat controls and the units can easily tip over;
- (2) if the turkey is not completely thawed when placed in the hot oil, it causes a spillover that ignites the oil and engulfs the unit in fire; and
- (3) turkey fryers should never be used on wooden decks, in garages or under awnings because of the potential fire problems.



Some indoor electric turkey fryers have been certified by testing labs such as CSA (the Canadian Standards Association) which is comparable to UL. Anyone planning to use an indoor electric turkey fryer should check the labeling to make sure it has been approved by a testing lab such as CSA or UL. Those who plan to deep fry their turkey this year, whether outdoors or indoors, should be familiar with the fire and burn dangers associated with this method of cooking. One source of information is <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yObDuYTfudY>.



**Smoking** is not the #1 cause of residential fires but is the #1 cause of fire deaths. The Great American Smokeout has been observed since 1977 on the third Thursday of November. It is primarily intended to encourage people to refrain from smoking for at least 24 hours and to investigate ways to stop completely. Spokane Regional Health District lists a variety of smoke cessation programs and support services at [srhd.org](http://srhd.org) through their Healthy Communities links. They also offer advice to property owners, managers and tenants on smoke-free housing options.

Everyone knows the rules about “never smoke in bed” or “never smoke around oxygen”. But many folks never connect the dots between smoker-caused fires and smoking when tired or when taking medication that makes them drowsy. There have also been significant fires in Spokane-area apartments caused by smokers using the “dirt” in flower beds or planters to extinguish their cigarette. Rather than dirt, the flowers were actually embedded in potting soil containing organic, combustible components.

### “Fall Back” to Standard Time

Now that your clocks are set back from Daylight Savings Time, it is good to remember the “Change your Clock, Change your Battery!” slogan. In the past, the fire service hoped that people would connect the clock change with the need to replace 1-year batteries in every smoke detector.

Now there is the awareness that people actually need to check on the type of battery they have in each smoke detector (i.e. 1-year alkaline or 10-year lithium) and the age of each detector. Find the exact date of manufacture on the back label of the detector. Calculate whether the detector unit itself is ten years or older and therefore needing to be replaced. Plan to replace aging units with photoelectric or dual sensor photo-ion models (rather than ionization detectors). Photoelectric sensors can sound the alarm on a smoldering type of fire ten to forty minutes faster than an ionization unit.

We recently found an ionization smoke detector that was manufactured on March 21, 1980. The apartment owner thought it was still a working detector because you could hear a siren when the test button was pressed. In fact, that only meant the battery was still connected to the horn. However, the 34-year old detector itself had not functioned as intended for the past 24 years! Luckily, no family perished in that apartment during those years.

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](mailto:jdoherty@spokanefire.org) or by calling 509.625.7058.



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