

# Macomb Township Fire Department

Fire Safety Tips

December 2008

## “Myth Buster” Edition (part 1)



Happy Holidays!

This month’s edition of Fire Safety Tips is the first installment that will address commonly held myths pertaining to fire safety. Hollywood movie makers do a really poor job with its portrayal of a house fire. They would have you believe that a fire in a home is bright with very little smoke, gives you plenty of time to save your own life and has little or no real heat. The only danger someone faces in a house fire is the obligatory “beam” that falls out of nowhere and lands across the chest of the star of the movie. This month, we offer a dose of reality.

### MYTH

If a fire broke out in my house, I will have several minutes to get dressed, alert my family, gather my belongings and then escape.

### REALITY

A fire in a house moves quickly. The smoke and heat generated is deadly and unbearable. When you think of the time you’ll have to escape, think of it in seconds – not minutes. Carbon Monoxide is present in every fire, but it is not the only dangerous gas. When a fire burns it puts out hydrogen cyanide and sulfur dioxide among others. These poisons disorient you and can put you in a deeper sleep. In a fire place and at camp fires these harmful gases are released into the atmosphere via chimneys or directly into the air. In a house fire, these gases are trapped and move easily from open door to door and poison everyone in the house.

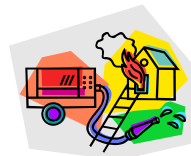
WHAT TO DO? ***Two things:***



### 1. ***Develop a Home Escape Plan that Includes –***

- Smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside of your sleeping areas and inside the bedrooms where you sleep with a closed door.

- Have both kinds of technology of smoke alarms (ionization and photoelectric), check them monthly and change the batteries annually. Consider purchasing 10-year lithium batteries.
- Consider having your smoke alarms inter-connected so that if one goes off, they all go off. This can give you valuable time if a fire starts in a distant part of your home. This helps you avoid being poisoned by a fire you don't know about yet. This can be done by an electrician with hard-wired smoke alarms. There are also battery-operated smoke alarms that "talk" to each other.
- Pre-plan two ways out of each room and out of your home. Make it possible to use each of these escape routes by maintaining windows, keeping your paths of escape free of clutter (expect not to be able to see as if blindfolded) and by making pre-plans for the uniqueness of your home and occupants.
- React immediately to the sound of a smoke alarm. If non-fire activations are taking place in your home, take steps to eliminate them so that you do not become so accustomed to the sound of a smoke alarm in your home that people ignore its warning.
- Choose a designated meeting place outside of the home. Once out – stay out! Call 911 and let the fire department do their job.
- Teach everyone in your home your escape plan and practice it at least twice a year. Update it as necessary.



## 2. **Avoid Having a Fire in your Home**

- Keep matches and lighters out of sight and reach of children. Keep all fire-starting materials in a secure and safe place. The kitchen counter, table, purse on the chair and coat pocket in the closet are not safe places.
- Do not store or work with gasoline in a home. These vapors can travel a long way and find an ignition source like your hot water heater or furnace.
- Do not leave candles, fireplace fires or cooking unattended.
- The best *fire marshal* in a home is a good housekeeper. A good housekeeper will find and remove unneeded fuel for a fire, keep escape routes clear, have heating sources properly maintained, treat ignition sources with respect and make sure safety principles are adhered to.

### MYTH

A lot of fires are just accidents and caused by things like electrical shorts. We can't do anything about it.

### REALITY

Most fires are caused by human action or inaction. In information compiled by the National Fire Protection Association, cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires (40% of reported fires). The leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking! As far as electrical fires are concerned, overloaded outlets, misuse of extension cords and bad electrical work are all avoidable human acts. The top 3 causes of injury

and death due to fire all have a human aspect to them. They are smoking, cooking and heating. If we can change our behavior, we can lessen the chance for a fire, and save our own life!

- Do not smoke in bed or if you are drowsy from lack of sleep or medication. The safest way to smoke is to always smoke outside.
- Have sturdy, deep ashtrays and soak cigarette butts in water before emptying into the garbage.
- Check couch and chair cushions before you go to bed. A fire can smolder for hours before breaking out into blaze. This can take place long after you are asleep. The whole time this smoldering fire can be pumping out fatal poisonous gases in your home while you sleep.
- Do not leave cooking unattended. Serious fires can happen in just seconds.
- Keep a lid in your kitchen as large (or larger) than any pan you would put on a stove top. In case of a fire, simply place the lid over the pan and turn off the burner. Do not try to remove the burning pan from the stove! You can easily spread the fire and/or burn yourself.
- If something inside your microwave or oven catches fire, leave the door closed and turn off the appliance.
- Pay attention to keep dish towels, paper towels and your clothing away from hot things in your kitchen. Roll up your sleeves.
- As with any fire, leave the home and call 911.
- Keep yourself and other things that can burn at least 3 feet from heating sources.
- Do not operate space heaters while you are sleeping. Look for models that have an auto-off feature in case they are tipped-over.
- Make sure your fireplace has a screen large enough to catch flying embers and rolling logs. Where do you keep the things you use to start the fire? Move the newspaper, kindling, etc. if they are too close.
- Have your furnace, wood stove, fireplace and chimney inspected annually to assure they are working properly.

Former California State Fire Marshall Chief Ron Coleman said, “If you want to be prepared for something, live it once or twice in your mind.” Play the “what-if” game with your personal situation. If you find that you do not like the probable outcome – make the change. If something is “predictable, it’s preventable” according to Gordon Graham, a top speaker on risk management. Predictable events cannot be accidents. There are sequences of events that take place prior to the final outcomes. Removing or changing one thing in the sequence changes the outcome.

If you have any questions, have comments or need help with implementing any of these fire safety tips please call Macomb Township Fire Department at (586) 286-0027. We’ll be happy to help.

**HAVE A FIRE-SAFE**

**HOLIDAY SEASON!**



From your Friends at Macomb Township Fire Department  
**REFERENCES**



National Fire Protection Association



United States Fire Administration



Macomb Township Fire Department  
*Safe from Fire Initiative*