

IN THE KNOW FIRE PREVENTION: A NATIONAL ISSUE

Fire Prevention works to educate people about the leading risks to home fires and ways they can better protect themselves and their loved ones. Local fire departments, schools, and community organizations play a key role in bringing Fire Prevention to life in their communities each year and spreading basic but critical fire safety messages.

“Prevention is the first line of defense against fire. Be alert and stay safe,” stated Rincon Fire Chief Chip Duncan. “In every community, the ability to prevent catastrophic damage is essential. By being alert and prioritizing fire safety, we not only protect our homes but also ensure the well-being of our neighbors.”

Fire Prevention’s widespread message coincides with the great Chicago Fire of 1871. As the story goes Kate O’ Leary went out to milk her cow on the evening of October 8th, 1871. The exact details of how the fire started were never determined, so one of her cows kicking over a lantern has been the most plausible theory. What is known for sure is the fire started in the O’ Leary’s barn.

In 1871, Chicago was the 4th largest city in the country. Chicago was cramped, and the city’s structures were framed and constructed predominately with wood. To make matters worse the city was also experiencing extreme drought at the time. On the night of the fire, winds were high and gusty - which brought the forces into alignment that would lead to the blaze.

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In the end, despite the assistance Milwaukee FD, Cincinnati FD and Dayton FD, the fire burned itself out when it hit a prairie on the Northern side of town. The last house to burn was on Fullerton Avenue near Lincoln Park. At the end of the ravenous



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inferno that set the city on fire, between 100-300 people were dead. The exact number has not been determined since it was believed that many were entirely consumed by the intense flames. As fate would have it, the O’ Leary’s home did not actually burn in the fire. Yet over 100,000 Chicagoans were left homeless due to the barn fire. The estimated loss has been estimated to cost over \$200 million dollars. This fire was significant moment in American history, so the anniversary date of this fire was chosen the time frame of Fire Prevention week.

“The safety of a community lies within its members making responsible choices and decisions,” stated Chairman Bo Mazzetti. “We must all work together to ensure that we can prevent the spread of fires across our community. This can only be done by following safety precautions related to this deeply important issue.”

This year’s safety message focuses on kitchen cooking safety.

“Cooking safety starts with YOU! Pay attention to fire prevention!”

This year’s focus on cooking safety works to educate the public about simple but important steps they can take to help reduce the risk of fire when cooking at home, keeping themselves and those around them safe.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) cooking is the leading cause of home fires, with nearly half (49%) of all home fires involving cooking equipment; cooking is also the leading cause of home fire injuries. Unattended cook-

ing is the leading cause of home cooking fires and related deaths. In addition, NFPA data shows that cooking is the only major cause of fire that resulted in more fires and fire deaths in 2014-2018 than in 1980-1984.

“These numbers tell us that more public awareness is needed around when and where cooking hazards exist, along with ways to prevent them,” said Lorraine Carli, vice president of the Outreach and Advocacy at NFPA. “This year’s Fire Prevention Week campaign will work to promote tips, guidelines, and recommendations that can help significantly reduce the risk of having a cooking fire.”



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Following are cooking safety messages that support this year’s theme, “Cooking safety starts with YOU! Pay attention to fire prevention”:

- Always keep a close eye on what you’re cooking. For foods with longer cook times, such as those that are simmering or baking, set a timer to help monitor them carefully.
- Clear the cooking area of combustible items and keep anything that can burn, such as dish towels, oven mitts, food packaging, and paper towels.
- Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove. Keep a lid nearby when cooking. If a small grease fire starts, slide the lid over the pan and turn off the burner.
- Create a “kid and pet free zone” of at least three feet around the cooking area and anywhere else hot food or drink is prepared or carried.

Staying in the kitchen, using a timer, and avoiding distractions that remove your focus from what’s on the stove are among the key messages for this year’s Fire Prevention campaign. 