

Fire Prevention Week - Busting a Myth

Fire Prevention Week was established to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire. The tragic 1871 conflagration that killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres. The fire began on October 8th, but continued into and did most of its damage on October 9, 1871.

According to popular legend, the fire broke out after a cow, belonging to Mrs. Catherine O'Leary, kicked over a lamp, setting first the barn, then the whole city on fire. Chances are you've heard some version of this story yourself; people have been blaming the Great Chicago Fire on the cow and Mrs. O'Leary, for more than 130 years. But recent research by Chicago historian Robert Cromie has helped to debunk this version of events.

The "Moo" Myth


Like any good story, the "case of the cow" has some truth to it. The great fire almost certainly started near the barn where Mrs. O'Leary kept her five milking cows. But there is no proof that O'Leary was in the barn when the fire broke out, or that a jumpy cow sparked the blaze. Mrs. O'Leary herself swore that she'd been in bed early that night, and that the cows were also tucked in for the evening.

But if a cow wasn't to blame for the huge fire, what was? Over the years, journalists and historians have offered plenty of theories. Some blamed the blaze on a couple of neighborhood boys who were near the barn sneaking cigarettes. Others believed that a neighbor of the O'Leary's may have started the fire. Some people have speculated that a fiery meteorite may have fallen to earth on October 8th, starting several fires that day, in Michigan and Wisconsin, as well as in Chicago.

The Biggest Blaze That Week

While the great Chicago Fire was the best-known blaze to start during this fiery two-day stretch, it wasn't the biggest. That distinction goes to the Peshtigo Fire, the most devastating forest fire in American history. The fire which also occurred on October 8, 1871, and roared through Northeast Wisconsin burning down 16 towns, killing 1,152 people, and scorching 1.2 million acres before it ended.

Historical accounts of the fire say that the blaze began when several railroad workers clearing land for tracks unintentionally started a brush fire. Before long, the fast-moving flames were whipping through the area "like a tornado," some survivors said. It was the small town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin that suffered the worst damage. Within an hour, the entire town had been destroyed.

In 1920, President Woodrow Wilson issued the first National Fire Prevention Day proclamation, and since 1922, Fire Prevention Week has been observed on the Sunday through Saturday period in which October 9th falls. 

National Fire Protection Agency

Practice Your Escape Plan

The theme for Fire Prevention Week this year is Practice Your Escape Plan. Of course what this theme assumes is that you have an escape plan in case of fire.

Your escape plan should include:

Two ways out of each room: In some cases you may be in a second floor room. This requires the ability to exit through a door and a window. The window exit may require a quick escape ladder.

The ability to go out a window by operating or breaking it out is essential to escape.

Working smoke alarms: Smoke alarms should be installed in every sleeping room, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. Alarms should be tested monthly and batteries replaced twice/year. They should be replaced every ten years.

A meeting place: A place outside the home should be designated as a meeting place. This is the spot that each person should report to once safely out of the house. This prearranged meeting place facilitates the accounting of family members.

Lots of Practice: Practicing your escape may be the most important part of your plan. It's one thing to plan but another to execute that plan during the time of crisis.

Do Not Re-enter Once safely out you should never re-enter the building. Fire and smoke spread quickly. The house becomes a death trap within just a few minutes. Heroics without the proper training and equipment lead to death.

Take a few minutes to plan the escape from each room of your house. Practice the plan with every member of your household participating. The time you spend planning and practicing may be the difference between survival and death. 🏠

*By Marty Kalbach
NJSBAIG Loss Control Manager*

Fire Extinguisher Usage

Even if you have not been “trained” in how to use a fire extinguisher, everyone should have a basic knowledge of how to use one. A fire may break out in your work area, or at home when cooking on a grill or on the stove. If you are called upon to use one, would you know what to do?

When using a typical extinguisher, follow the “**PASS**” method. This method includes holding the extinguisher upright, and:

Pulling the pin and standing back 8 or 10 feet from the fire.

Aim at the base of the fire.

Squeezing the handle to release the extinguishing agent.

Sweeping at the base of the fire with the extinguishing agent.


Do not aim high at the flames because the fire probably won't be extinguished. Instead, quickly spray at the base of the fire. Be sure not to aim at the smoke or flames because most extinguishers have a very limited operation time of only 8 to 10 seconds. 🏠

Claims Corner Article:

Are You Protecting Your District from Negligence of others?

The Business Administrators should be making sure that those who do work for your district have coverage that protects the school district and provides adequate limits. If the contractor/vendor who is doing work for the school district has provided you with this information, are you verifying this information to make sure it is accurate? This seems so routine but don't do it and see what happens if there is a loss and the contractor/vendor did not have the coverage they said they had.

If you want to make sure you are not paying for something you did not cause, always confirm that the

party doing the work for you has insurance coverage and the policy limits are adequate to cover that exposure. Do they agree to defend you when they are at fault? Your soliciting attorney should be consulted whenever there are contracts involved. Your insurance broker or our Member Services Department can also assist you in these matters. 

*By Lou Giannetto
NJSBAIG Claim Manager*

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK QUIZ

“Practice Your Escape Plan!” That is the message of Fire Prevention Week 2007. It’s not enough just to have a fire escape plan. To escape safely from a home fire you’ve got to make sure that everyone in the home has practiced the plan as well. Take this new Fire Prevention Week quiz and see how many questions you can answer correctly. Good luck!

- 1. What percentage of household have actually developed and practiced a home fire escape plan to ensure they could escape quickly and safely?**
 - a. 50%
 - b. 30%
 - c. 23%
 - d. 75%
- 2. Smoke alarms are needed:**
 - a. in every sleeping room, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
 - b. in all rooms in the home.
 - c. in all rooms in home except for the bedrooms.
 - d. in every sleeping room and on every level of the home.
- 3. Smoke alarms should be tested at least:**
 - a. once a week.
 - b. once a month.
 - c. once a year.
 - d. they don’t need to be tested.
- 4. Smoke alarms should be replaced:**
 - a. when they chirp.
 - b. when you paint the ceiling.
 - c. every 10 years.
 - d. every Fire Prevention Week.
- 5. More than half of all home fire deaths result from incidents reported between:**
 - a. 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.
 - b. 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
 - c. 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
 - d. 1:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- 6. What kind of fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries?**
 - a. Heating
 - b. Cooking
 - c. Smoking
 - d. Electrical
- 7. Heading down the hallway to the stairs and there is smoke, what should you do?**
 - a. Grab a towel and block your face.
 - b. Run
 - c. Use you second way out
 - d. Hold your breath.

- 8. An escape plan should include:**
- a. Two ways out of every room and an outside meeting place.
 - b. Two ways out of every room and a fire extinguisher and a meeting place.
 - c. Two ways out of every room, smoke alarms, and outside meeting place and practice.
 - d. Two ways out of every room, smoke alarms, telephone, and an outside meeting place.
- 9. In a fire you may have as little as two minutes to escape however, a recent poll showed three-quarters of Americans think they have _____ before a fire can turn deadly?**
- a. Less than 4.
 - b. Less than 6
 - c. Less than 8
 - d. Less than 10
- 10. If you want to be counted, you should be part of:**
- a. Practice your escape plan.
 - b. The Great American Fire Drill
 - c. Get out, stay out.
 - d. Go to your meeting place. 🏠

Answers:

- 1. c
- 2. a
- 3. b
- 4. c
- 5. a
- 6. b
- 7. c
- 8. c
- 9. d
- 10. b

FIVE

Safety Tools You Can't Live Without

- 1. Smoke detectors:** Install smoke detectors on every floor and outside each bedroom, and test them regularly.
- 2. Fire extinguishers:** Keep extinguishers in your kitchen and garage. Most fire extinguishers are combination Class ABC types. Class A puts out fires of ordinary combustibles. Class B is used on fires involving flammable liquids such as oil. Class C is used on electrical fires.
- 3. Carbon monoxide detectors:** Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, and it can be fatal unless detected. Place a detector outside of all bedrooms in your home.
- 4. Ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs):** Use GFCIs throughout your home, especially in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry room. A GFCI protects against electric shock in case you come in contact with a live wire.
- 5. First-aid/emergency kit:** Store antibiotic ointment, bandages, adhesive tape, cold packs, antibacterial hand cleaner, scissors, tweezers, eyewash and a flashlight in an easily accessible place. 🏠