

Facts About Fire/Safety



Fire kills more Americans than all natural disasters combined. Every year more than 5,000 people die in fires, over 25,000 are injured, and direct property loss is estimated at over \$9 billion. Fortunately, most fire losses can be prevented through effective public education and awareness initiatives. Many Americans believe "fires can only happen to other people not to me and not in my home." Yet, over 80 percent of fire deaths occur in the home, most often claiming the lives of the young, the elderly and the disadvantaged.

Fire in the United States

- The U.S. has one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world. For 1998, the U.S. fire death rate was 14.9 deaths per million populations.
- Between 1994 and 1998, an average of 4,400 Americans lost their lives and another 25,100 were injured annually as the result of fire.
- About 100 firefighters are killed each year in duty-related incidents.
- Each year, fire kills more Americans than all natural disasters combined.
- Fire is the third leading cause of accidental death in the home; at least 80 percent of all fire deaths occur in residences.
- About 2 million fires are reported each year. Many others go unreported, causing additional injuries and property loss.
- Property loss due to fires is estimated at \$8.6 billion annually.

Where Fires Occur

There were 1,755,000 fires in the United States in 1998. Of these:

- 41% were Outside Fires
- 29% were Structure Fires
- 22% were Vehicle Fires
- 8 % were fires of other types

Residential fires represent 22 percent of all fires and 74 percent of structure fires. Fires in 1-2 family dwellings most often start in the:

1. Kitchen 23.5%
2. Bedroom 12.7%
3. Living Room 7.9%
4. Chimney 7.1
5. Laundry Area 4.7%

Apartment fires most often start in the:

1. Kitchen 46.1%
2. Bedroom 12.3%
3. Living Room 6.2%
4. Laundry Area 3.3%
5. Bathroom 2.4%

The South has the highest fire death rate per-capita with 18.4 civilian deaths per million populations. Studies have found 80 percent of all fatalities occur in the home. Of those, approximately 85 percent occur in single-family homes and duplexes.

Causes of Fires and Fire Deaths

- Cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. It is also the leading cause of home fire injuries. Cooking fires often result from unattended cooking and human error, rather than mechanical failure of stoves or ovens.
- Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths. Smoke alarms and smolder-resistant bedding and upholstered furniture are significant fire deterrents.
- Heating is the second leading cause of residential fires and the second leading cause of fire deaths. However, heating fires are a larger problem in single-family homes than in apartments. Unlike apartments, the heating systems in single-family homes are often not professionally maintained.
- Arson is both the third leading cause of residential fires and residential fire deaths. In commercial properties, arson is the major cause of deaths, injuries and dollar loss.

Who is Most at Risk?

- Senior citizens age 70 and over and children under the age of 5 have the greatest risk of fire death.
- The fire death risk among seniors is more than double the average population.
- The fire death risk for children under age 5 is nearly double the risk of the average population.
- Children under the age of 10 accounted for an estimated 17 percent of all fire deaths in 1996.
- Men die or are injured in fires almost twice as often as women.
- African Americans and American Indians have significantly higher death rates per capita than the national average.
- Although African Americans comprise 13 percent of the population, they account for 26 percent of fire deaths.

What Saves Lives?

- A working smoke alarm dramatically increases a person's chance of surviving a fire.
- Approximately 88 percent of U.S. homes have at least one smoke alarm. However, these alarms are not always properly maintained and as a result might not work in an emergency. There has been a disturbing increase over the last ten years in the number of fires that occur in homes with non-functioning alarms.
- It is estimated that over 40 percent of residential fires and three-fifths of residential fatalities occur in homes with no smoke alarms.
- Residential sprinklers have become more cost effective for homes. Currently, they protect few homes.

Source: National Fire Protection Association 1998 *Fire Loss in the U.S. and Fire in the United States 1987-1996 11th Edition*