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FIRE DEPARTMENT

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IF YOU MUST SMOKE, SMOKE SAFELY AROUND THE HOME

Be Prepared - Smoking materials structure fires can be deadly and expensive

The following is one of a series of articles on Community Risk Reduction presented by the Muscatine Fire Department.

MUSCATINE, Iowa – The focus this week is on smoking safety in and around your home. With warm temperatures and high winds, it is especially important to be responsible with discarded cigarettes. The following article provides more information on smoking and home fire safety tips.



The place where we feel safest, at home, is where most smoking materials structure fires, deaths, and injuries occur. Smoking materials, including cigarettes, pipes, and cigars, are the



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leading cause of fire deaths but are preventable.

"Carelessly discarded or abandoned smoking materials cause more fire deaths than any other type of residential fire," David Grafton, Muscatine Fire Department firefighter, said. "Smoking material fires may smolder for hours before the first flames appear, and that can create a dangerous situation especially if smoke detectors are not present or not working properly. For most people who died, escape was even more difficult because they were asleep."

An article published by Hartford Insurance noted that several factors contribute to the high fatality rates of cigarette and smoking fires. Smoking materials are often in close proximity to people.

"In fact, a leading cause of smoking fire fatalities involves the person falling asleep or passing out with a lit cigarette," the article said. "The lit cigarette ignites the mattress, couch or upholstered furniture where the person is sleeping and because the fire is so close to the person upon igniting, it is difficult to escape harm."

The most common materials to first ignite are mattresses and bedding, followed by trash, and upholstered furniture. Materials in upholstered furniture ignite quickly, consume a great deal of oxygen and release toxins.

The 2021 national estimates for residential building smoking fires and losses show that there were 7,800 fires, 275 deaths, 750 injuries, and \$361,500,000 in dollar loss. The U.S. Fire Administration states that it is important for smokers to know the steps they can take to keep themselves and their families safe from fire.

According to the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) the risk of dying in a home structure fire caused by smoking materials rises with age. It is not just the smoker who is most at risk, it is also family members or those residing in the structure with them. One out of four



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fatal victims are not the smoker whose cigarette started the fire.

If you smoke, use only fire-safe cigarettes. In 2003, the United States began requiring that cigarettes be manufactured with a reduced propensity to burn when not being smoked, and that was one factor in a roughly 20 percent reduction in fire related deaths between 2003 and 2010.

Smoking Safety

- **Keep smoking materials out of the reach of children.** Keep cigarettes, lighters, matches, and other smoking materials up high out of the reach of children, in a locked cabinet. Teach young children that matches and lighters are tools, not toys.
- **Smoke outside.** Many things in your home can catch on fire if they touch something hot like a cigarette or ashes. It is always safer to smoke outside. Most deaths result from fires that started in living rooms, family rooms, and dens or in bedrooms.
- **Smoke only where it is allowed.** If you smoke, only smoke where it is allowed. Use deep, sturdy ashtrays.
- **Take care when disposing of cigarettes.** Do not throw cigarettes where they can easily catch fire: into bushes, potted plants or landscaping, peat moss, dried grasses or mulch.
- **Put your cigarette out in an ashtray or bucket with sand.** Use ashtrays with a wide base so they won't tip over and start a fire, and place it away from anything that can burn.
- **Put cigarettes out all the way.** Do this every time. Don't walk away from lit cigarettes and other smoking materials. Put water on the ashes and butts to make sure they are really out before you put them in the trash.
- **Douse the ashes.** Before you throw away butts and ashes, make sure they are out, and dousing in water or sand is the best way to do that.



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- **Never smoke in bed.** Mattresses and bedding can catch on fire easily. Do not smoke in bed because you might fall asleep with a lit cigarette.
- **Be alert. Do not smoke after taking medicine that makes you tired.** You may not be able to prevent or escape from a fire if you are sleepy, have taken medicine that makes you tired, or have drunk alcohol
- **Never smoke around medical oxygen.** Medical oxygen can explode if a flame or spark is nearby. Even if the oxygen is turned off, it can still catch on fire. Medical oxygen can cause materials to ignite more easily and make fires burn at a faster rate than normal. It can make an existing fire burn faster and hotter.

Electronic Cigarette Safety Tips

- The main cause of e-cigarette fires and explosions is failure of the lithium-ion batteries.
- Don't charge your e-cigarette with a phone or tablet charger.
- Don't charge your e-cigarette overnight.
- Don't leave charging e-cigarettes unattended.
- Store loose batteries for your e-cigarette in a case.
- Keep e-cigarettes away from metal objects.
- E-cigarettes should be used with caution.

[Smoking & Home Fire Safety\(PDF\)](#)