



COUNTY OF PRINCE WILLIAM

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DEPARTMENT OF
FIRE & RESCUE

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Chief

PRESS RELEASE

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Cooking Fires Peak During Holidays

It's a known fact that more individuals cook during the winter holiday season than any other festive holiday throughout the year with Thanksgiving being the peak day for home cooking fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)(www.nfpa.gov), cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries with unattended cooking as the leading cause of these fires. People tend to not pay attention while cooking, therefore, the majority of cooking equipment fires are the result of human error rather than malfunctioning equipment. Cooking equipment has the probability of igniting common household items such as paper or plastic bags, food, grease, cabinets, wall coverings, or curtains due to close proximity to the heat source. Of the number of home fires reported, three out of ten home fires start in the kitchen and two out of three start with the range or stove. NFPA states that electric ranges or stoves have a higher risk of fires, injuries and property damage whereas gas ranges or stoves have a higher risk of fire deaths. In 2005, 480 deaths and over 4,600 injuries were associated with cooking equipment fires.

As we begin to celebrate the holidays, the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue (www.pwcgov.org/fire) and NFPA urges everyone to practice fire safety and recommends the following cooking safety tips:

- Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, broiling or boiling food.
- If you must leave the room turn off the stove
- When simmering, baking or roasting, check it frequently and use a timer as a reminder.
- Keep cooking areas clean and clear of combustibles (e.g. potholders, towels, rags, drapes and food packaging).
- Keep children away from cooking areas by enforcing a "kid-free zone" of three feet (1 meter) around the stove.
- Keep pets from underfoot so you do not trip while cooking.

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- Wear short, close fitting or tightly rolled sleeves when cooking. Loose clothing can dangle onto stove burners and catch fire.
- **Never** use a wet oven mitt, as it presents a scald danger if the moisture in the mitt is heated. Always keep a potholder, oven mitt and lid handy. If a small fire starts in a pan on the stove, put on an oven mitt and smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan. Turn off the burner. Don't remove the lid until it is completely cool.
- **Never** pour water on a grease fire and **never** discharge a fire extinguisher onto a pan fire; it can spray/shoot burning grease around the kitchen, actually spreading the fire.
- If there is an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed.
- If there is a microwave fire, keep the door closed and unplug the microwave. Have the oven serviced before you use it again.

Working smoke alarms play an important role in the reduction of deaths from cooking fires. They remind distracted individuals about food forgotten on the stove. Yet, all too often, unwanted activations during cooking have caused many individuals to disable their smoke alarms. No matter the circumstance, **do not** disable your smoke alarms and remember to test your smoke alarms monthly and change the batteries when you change your clocks during spring and fall.

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