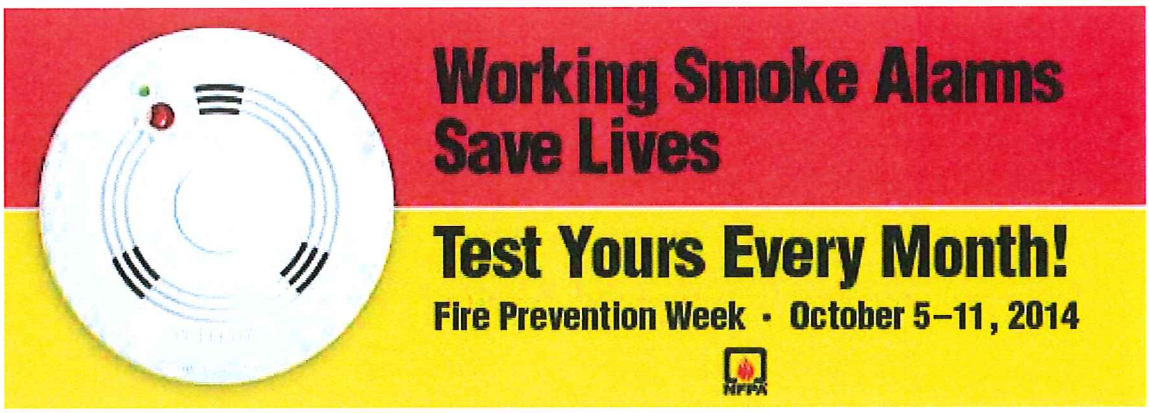

ABOUT FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

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 8, but continued into and did most of its damage on October 9, 1871.

Commemorating a conflagration
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 8, 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 8th, 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.

Nine decades of fire prevention
Those who survived the Chicago and Peshtigo fires never forgot what they'd been through; both blazes produced countless tales of bravery and heroism. But the fires also changed the way that firefighters and public officials thought about fire safety. On the 40th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire, the Fire Marshals Association of North America (today known as the International Fire Marshals Association), decided that the anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire should henceforth be observed not with festivities, but in a way that would keep the public informed about the importance of fire prevention. The commemoration grew incrementally official over the years.

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 9 falls. According to the National Archives and Records Administration's Library Information Center, Fire Prevention Week

is the longest running public health and safety observance on record. The President of the United States has signed a proclamation proclaiming a national observance during that week every year since 1925.

Fast facts about fire

Home fires

- In 2011, U.S. fire departments responded to 370,000 home structure fires. These fires caused 13,910 civilian injuries, 2,520 civilian deaths, $6.9 billion in direct damage.
- On average, seven people died in U.S. home fires per day from 2007 to 2011.
- Cooking is the leading cause home fires and home fire injuries, followed heating equipment.
- Smoking is a leading cause of civilian home fire deaths.
- Most fatal fires kill one or two people. In 2012, 8 home fires killed five or more people resulting in a total of 44 deaths.

Smoke alarms

- Almost three of five (60%) of reported home fire deaths in 2007 to 2011 resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.
- Working smoke alarms cut the risk of dying in reported home fires in half.
- In fires considered large enough to activate the smoke alarm, hardwired alarms operated 93% of the time, while battery powered alarms operated only 79% of the time.
- When smoke alarms fail to operate, it is usually because batteries are missing, disconnected, or dead.
- An ionization smoke alarm is generally more responsive to flaming fires and a photoelectric smoke alarm is generally more responsive to smoldering fires. For the best protection, or where extra time is needed, to awaken or assist others, both types of alarms, or combination ionization and photoelectric alarms are recommended.

Escape Planning

- According to an NFPA survey, only one-third of Americans have both developed and practiced a home fire escape plan.
- Almost three-quarters of Americans do have an escape plan; however, more than half never practiced it.
- One-third (32%) of respondents who made an estimate thought they would have at least 6 minutes before a fire in their home would become life threatening. The time available is often less. Only 8% said their first thought on hearing a smoke alarm would be to get out!

Cooking

- U.S. Fire Departments responded to an estimated annual average of 156,600 cooking-related fires between 2007-2011, resulting in 400 civilian deaths, 5,080 civilian injuries and $853 million in direct damage.
- Two of every five home fires started in the kitchen.
- Unattended cooking was a factor in 34% of reported home cooking fires.
- Two-thirds of home cooking fires started with ignition of food or other cooking materials.
- Ranges accounted for the 57% of home cooking fire incidents. Ovens accounted for 16%.
- Children under five face a higher risk of non-fire burns associated with cooking and hot food and drinks than being burned in a cooking fire.
- Microwave ovens are one of the leading home products associated with scald burn injuries not related to fires. According to the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, two out of five of the microwave oven injuries seen at emergency rooms in 2011 were scald burns.

- Clothing was the item first ignited in less than 1% of home cooking fires, but these incidents accounted for 15% of the cooking fire deaths.

Heating

- The leading factor contributing to heating equipment fires was failure to clean, principally creosote from solid fueled heating equipment, primarily chimneys.
- Portable or fixed space heaters, including wood stoves, were involved in one-third (33%) of home heating fires and four out of five (81%) home heating deaths.
- Half of home heating fire deaths resulted from fires caused by heating equipment too close to things that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattresses or bedding.
- In most years, heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires, fire deaths, and fire injuries.
- Fixed or portable space heaters are involved in about 4 out of 5 heating fire deaths.

Smoking materials

- During 2007-2011 smoking materials caused an estimated 17,900 home structure fires, resulting in 580 deaths, 1,280 injuries and $509 million in direct property damage, per year.
- Sleep was a factor in 31% of the home smoking material fire deaths.
- Possible alcohol impairment was a factor in one in five (18%) of home smoking fire deaths.
- In recent years, Canada and the United States have required that all cigarettes sold must be "fire safe," that is have reduced ignition strength and less likely to start fires.

Electrical

- About half (48%) of home electrical fires involved electrical distribution or lighting equipment. Other leading types of equipment were washer or dryer, fan, portable or stationary space heater, air conditioning equipment water heater and range.
- Electrical failure or malfunctions caused an average of almost 48,000 home fires per year, resulting in roughly 450 deaths and nearly $1.5 billion in direct property damage.

Candles

- During 2007-2011 candles caused 3% of home fires, 4% of home fire deaths, 7% of home fire injuries and 6% of direct property damage from home fires.
- On average, there are 32 home candle fires reported per day.
- More than one-third of these fires (36%) started in the bedroom; however, the candle industry found that only 13% of candle users burn candles in the bedroom most often.
- Nearly three in five candle fires (56%) start when things that can burn are too close to the candle.

For more information, go to the National Fire Protection Association website - http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/fire-prevention-week