

Put a Lid on Stovetop Fires

Cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home injuries across Canada. The leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking. It's important to be alert to prevent cooking fires.

According to the National Fire Protection Association in 2011, cooking was involved in an estimated 156,300 home structure fires that were reported. These fires caused 470 deaths, 5390 injuries and \$1.0 billion in direct property damage. Cooking caused 43% of reported home fires, 16% of home fire deaths, 38% of home fire injuries, and 12% of the direct property damage.

Based on 2007-2011 annual averages, unattended cooking was by far the leading contributing factor in these fires. Two-thirds (67%) of home cooking fires started with the ignition of food or other cooking materials. Clothing was the item first ignited in less than 1% of these fires, but these incidents accounted for 15% of the cooking fire deaths. Ranges accounted for the largest share (57%) of home cooking fire incidents. Ovens accounted for 16% and more than half (55%) of reported non-fatal home cooking fire injuries occurred when the victims tried to fight the fire themselves.

When you are cooking, be alert. If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, don't use the stove or stovetop. Always stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove. If you are simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling food, check it regularly, remain in the home while food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you that you are cooking. Keep anything that can catch fire (oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels or curtains, etc.) away from your stovetop. Always keep a lid nearby to smother small grease fires. If a fire starts, cover the pan with the lid, turn off the stove and leave the pan covered until it is completely cooled. For an oven fire turn off the heat and keep the door closed until it has completely burned out. Have a fire extinguisher (preferably a class 'A' wet chemical fire extinguisher) in the kitchen and make sure everyone in your home knows how to use it. If you have a very small cooking fire and attempt to fight the fire yourself with a fire extinguisher, be sure anyone else in the house follows the home escape plan and gets out of the house immediately. Also ensure that you have a clear way out. Flames can get out of control in mere seconds! Don't take a risk, just get out of the house and close the door behind you to help contain the fire. Call 9-1-1 once you have left the house.

To operate a fire extinguisher, first keep your back to a clear exit and stand 6 to 8 feet away from the fire, then remember the acronym "PASS" P - pull the pin to unlock the lever, A - aim low at the base of the fire, S - squeeze the lever or button, & S - sweep the nozzle or hose from side to side keeping it aimed at the base of the fire and carefully walking towards the fire. Once the fire goes out, watch the fire area and be prepared to repeat the process if the fire re-ignites. Following a fire, even if you're sure you've extinguished the fire, have the fire department inspect the fire site.

Never hesitate to call 911 if you're unsure about a fire and make sure your household has working smoke alarms & carbon monoxide alarms, a home escape plan and fire extinguishers. You can never be too prepared for an emergency.

Yours in fire safety,

Daniel Robinson

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