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Rash of Home Fires in April are Cause for Concern

State Fire Marshal David Tyler is concerned with the number of home fires that have occurred in Alaska this month. Some of these fires were very close calls for the residents that were in the home at the time of the fire.

“Following some simple fire prevention tips could have prevented most of these fires from occurring” Tyler said.

Five kitchen fires that caused significant damage to residences in the Fairbanks area were reported in the last 30 days. These fires had one common factor contributing to their cause – unattended cooking. Food was left on the stove cooking while the occupants left the kitchen. Alaskans need to be aware of how fast a fire can grow and how important it is to “Watch what You Heat.”

A house fire off Chena Hot Springs Road resulted in a very close call for a man, his wife and three grandchildren that were staying with them. The homeowner was awakened at 5 a.m. by the sound of breaking glass from a fire that started in an attached chicken coop and extended into the living room of his home. He woke his wife and grandchildren and escaped the burning building. One of the grandchildren, a 5-year-old boy, tired and confused re-entered the burning house. His grandfather went in after him and was able to find the boy in the heavy smoke when the boy started coughing. This could have been a tragic mistake for the boy and his grandfather. Fire Marshal Tyler reminds Alaskans “when your house is on fire, get out and stay out.”

Another home was destroyed when smoldering charcoal from a barbeque grill set the deck on fire and spread to the house. The two adults living in the home were awakened by their two barking dogs and escaped unharmed. The two dogs perished in the fire.

“Properly extinguishing the barbeque coals could have prevented this fire” Tyler said.

Tyler also reminds Alaskans how important it is to have operating smoke alarms that can alert you in time to escape a fire. Some other basic safety tips that could protect you and your loved ones are:

- Turn off the stove if you have to leave the kitchen
- Keep combustibles away from cooking area
- Do not overload electrical circuits
- Use only UL approved appliances and electrical cords
- Maintain heating equipment and check annually by a certified technician
- Keep portable heaters at least 36 inches from combustible materials
- Keep matches and lighters out of children’s reach
- If you smoke, smoke outside and use sturdy deep ashtrays
- Use sturdy candle holders and blow them out when you leave the room
- Install and maintain smoke alarms in all rooms except kitchen and bathrooms
- Have an escape plan and practice it regularly
- In case of fire, “get out and stay out”

Tyler reminds Alaskans that a residential fire suppression sprinkler system in conjunction with working smoke alarms and practicing these fire safety tips is your best defense against the ravages of fire.

For more information, contact Mahlon Greene, the public education coordinator for the Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety at (907)746-5062.