



FIRE & RESCUE NSW



MEDIA RELEASE

New fire statistics launch 2011 Winter Fire Safety Campaign

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The Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Michael Gallacher, has revealed new household fire statistics that show more than 40 per cent of all fire fatalities occur in winter.

The Minister launched the annual Winter Fire Safety campaign to warn the public of the fire dangers that exist in the family home.

According to the new statistics, which are part of a current research project being undertaken by Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW), kitchens are the source of 49 per cent of household fires each year.

“Firefighters around Australia dread the first day of winter, because there is always a spike in the number of house fires as people leave cooking unattended and start using more heating than other times of the year,” Mr Gallacher said.

“So it’s probably not a surprise that there are many more kitchen fires in winter compared to summer months.

“People need to be vigilant in their homes this winter. It’s basic steps like turning heaters off and not overloading power points. The best way to keep your family out of harm’s way is by doing a fire safety audit of your home.”

The statistics also showed that 27 per cent of residential fires were started in areas of the home other than the kitchen, bedroom, lounge, laundry or garage.

These figures were part of a FRNSW research project that examined more than 22,000 fire records over five years between 2006 and 2010. More results, based on demographics and what appliances are the major cause of fires, are expected in the coming months.

Mr Gallacher also presented household fire survivor and now fire safety campaigner, Linda Buchan, of Newport, with a special Commissioner’s Commendation for her brave efforts in being the face of a NSW television commercial for the winter fire safety campaign.

“Linda tragically endured the loss of her sister and also suffered many personal injuries due to a home fire, and has spent many years undergoing rehabilitation,” Mr Gallacher said.

“It’s the tragic stories of survivors like Linda that reinforce the dangers of household fires and encourages individuals to take steps to prevent them.”

FRNSW Commissioner Greg Mullins said 10 per cent of fires start in bedrooms, with the new research showing they were caused mostly by heating and electrical equipment.

“There is a large rise in the number of bedroom fires during winter, but this can be prevented with simple steps such as maintaining your appliances and turning them off before you leave the room or go to sleep,” Commissioner Mullins said.

“Sadly household fires occur too often in the colder months. In 2010 there were 25 fatalities and 558 injuries in almost 4,500 residential fires in NSW for the year.”

NSW Rural Fire Service Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers said householders should always remain mindful that fires can occur in all parts of the home. While the majority of fires originate in living areas such as the lounge, kitchen and bedrooms, almost a third of home fires start in other areas like hallways.

“A faulty fusebox, unattended candles, or an overloaded powerpoint could start a fire that destroys your property, or worse, injures your family,” Deputy Commissioner Rogers said.

Fire authorities in partnership with sponsors GIO and McDonalds are encouraging householders to complete an online Home Fire Safety Audit as part of the winter fire safety campaign at: www.homefiresafetyaudit.com.au

Media resources

The FRNSW website www.fire.nsw.gov.au contains a number of resources for the media, including videos and photos of various fire scenes, and radio grabs for media at <http://firestations.fire.nsw.gov.au/download/winter2011/>

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Winter fire safety checklist

Fact

Statistics reveal that almost half of all home fires are started in the kitchen and 43% of all fire fatalities occur in winter.

Is your home winter fire safe?

We recommend this simple safety checklist to help keep homes fire safe this winter. Make sure you and everyone in your household follows the following safety advice:

- Most importantly, have an adequate number of suitable smoke alarms installed throughout your home and make sure that you test them regularly.
- Make sure you and all your family know two safe ways out of every room in your home.
- Have a written home escape plan in case of fire and practice it regularly.
- Never ever leave cooking unattended.
- If you have a fireplace in your home make sure the chimney is clean.
- If you have a fireplace always place a screen in front of it when in use.
- Check electric blankets for damage or frayed cords before placing on the bed.
- Take care to keep curtains, tablecloths and bedding away from portable heaters.
- Keep wet clothing at least 1 metre from heaters or fireplaces and never leave unattended.

- If you use a clothes dryer make sure you clean the lint filter each and every time you use it.
- Only use one appliance per power point and switch off when not in use.
- Always extinguish candles or any other open flames before going to bed.
- Always handle candles or any other open flame with care.
- Store matches or lighters in a secure place not accessible to young children.

Winter Fire Safety Tips

- To test an electric blanket lay it flat on top of the bed, then switch it on for five minutes before putting it on the bed for use to confirm it is okay.
- Use only authorised installers of fixed heating appliances.
- Oil, gas or wood heating units may require a yearly maintenance check.
- Only use fuses of recommended rating and install an electrical safety switch.
- If possible, in the kitchen keep a fire extinguisher and fire blanket placed near the exit.
- Never leave burning candles or any open flame unattended.

Printable factsheet

[Winter fire safety checklist](#) (PDF, 42Kb)