



Holiday Safe Cooking Practices

By: Chip Hart, Assistant Fire Marshal, Spotsylvania FREM

Cooking is the most common cause of house fires in the United States. Cooking fires are the leading cause of civilian fire injuries in houses. The highest numbers of injuries are recorded during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday seasons. Here is a list of cooking tips that will assist you with having a fire safe holiday season.

- Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you have to leave the kitchen, turn off the stove.
- Stay alert! To prevent cooking fires, you must be alert. Consuming alcohol, feeling sleepy, or being impaired by medication will decrease your alert status. Keep small children out of the kitchen, they can distract you, or hurt themselves.
- If you are simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling food, check it regularly and remain in your home. Use a timer to remind you that food is cooking.
- Keep anything that can catch fire – potholders, oven mitts, towels, cloths, wooden or plastic utensils, paper towels, bags, or curtains away from your stovetop.
- Wear short, close fitting or tightly rolled sleeves when cooking. Loose clothing can touch the stove burners and catch fire on either the gas flame or electric burners.
- Keep stovetop, burners and oven clean. Check for foreign objects before using.
- Plug microwaves ovens and other cooking appliances directly into an outlet. Never use an extension cord for a cooking appliance, it could cause your electrical circuits to overload and start a fire.

Turkey Fryer Fire Safety Tips

- Use turkey fryers outdoors a safe distance from buildings, or any other combustible materials.
- Never use turkey fryers on a wooden deck or in a garage.
- Be sure that the turkey fryer is on a flat, even surface to reduce tipping.

Cont'd on Page 2

- Never leave the fryer unattended. Most units do not have thermostat controls. If you do not watch the fryer carefully, the oil will continue to heat until it catches fire.
- Never let children or pets near the fryer during operation and several hours after use. The oil inside will remain dangerously hot for a long period of time after use.
- To avoid spillover, do not over fill fryer. Premeasure the oil level with the turkey you are going to cook before lighting the burner.
- Make sure the turkey is completely thawed and be careful of marinades. Oil and water do not mix; water causes oil to spillover causing a fire or even an explosion. The National Turkey Foundation recommends thawing a turkey in the refrigerator approximately 24 hours for every 5 pounds in weight.
- Use well-insulated potholders or oven mitts when touching the pot or lid handles. If possible wear eye protection in the event the oil splatters on you.
- **Keep an all-purpose fire extinguisher nearby.** Never use water on a grease or oil fire. Call 911 if the fryer catches fire and attempt to use the extinguisher from a safe distance to extinguish the fire. If the fire goes out, you can always call and cancel the Fire Department.

If You Have a Cooking Fire

- **When in doubt, just get out.** When you leave, close the door behind you which will help contain the fire. Call 911 after you leave the house.
- If you try to fight the fire, be sure others are already getting out and you have a clear path to the exit door.
- Always keep an oven mitt and a lid nearby when you are cooking. If a small grease fire starts in a pan, smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan (make sure you are wearing the oven mitt). Turn off the burner. Do not move the pan. Leave the pan alone until it cools to prevent the fire from restarting.
- In case of an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent the flames from burning you.

- If you have a fire in your microwave oven, turn it off immediately and keep the door closed. Never open a door unless the fire is completely out. Secure the power to the appliance by either unplugging it or switching off the breaker.
- After a fire, both ovens and microwaves should be checked and/or serviced before using again.

Protect Children from Scalds and Burns

Children under the age of five face a higher risk of non-fire burns associated with cooking than being burned in a cooking fire. Help prevent these types of injuries by following a few basic tips. **Teach children that hot things burn.**

- Keep children out of the kitchen while you are cooking. They can distract you from cooking and cooking can distract you from watching the child.
- Do not carry hot food over children; stay at least 3 feet away from children when carrying hot foods.
- Keep hot foods and liquids away from the table and counter edges. Keep all handles turned away from the stove top, table, or counter edges.
- Use the stove top's rear burners if you have young children in the home.
- Never hold a child while cooking, drinking, or carrying hot foods or liquids.

Never remove batteries from a smoke alarm that activates while cooking. The smoke alarm may have been installed too close to the kitchen and should be moved further away from cooking appliances. All smoke alarm installations must be in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. If you have any questions on smoke alarm installations, contact your local fire station.

Following these tips will assist you and your family with having a safe and joyful holiday season.

References:

U.S. Fire Administration Holiday Cooking.2011, <http://usfa.fema.gov/focus/cooking.shtm>

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Home Fires Involving Cooking Equipment
(pdf,896Kb)

National Turkey Foundation (NTF) Safety Tips for Turkey Fryers