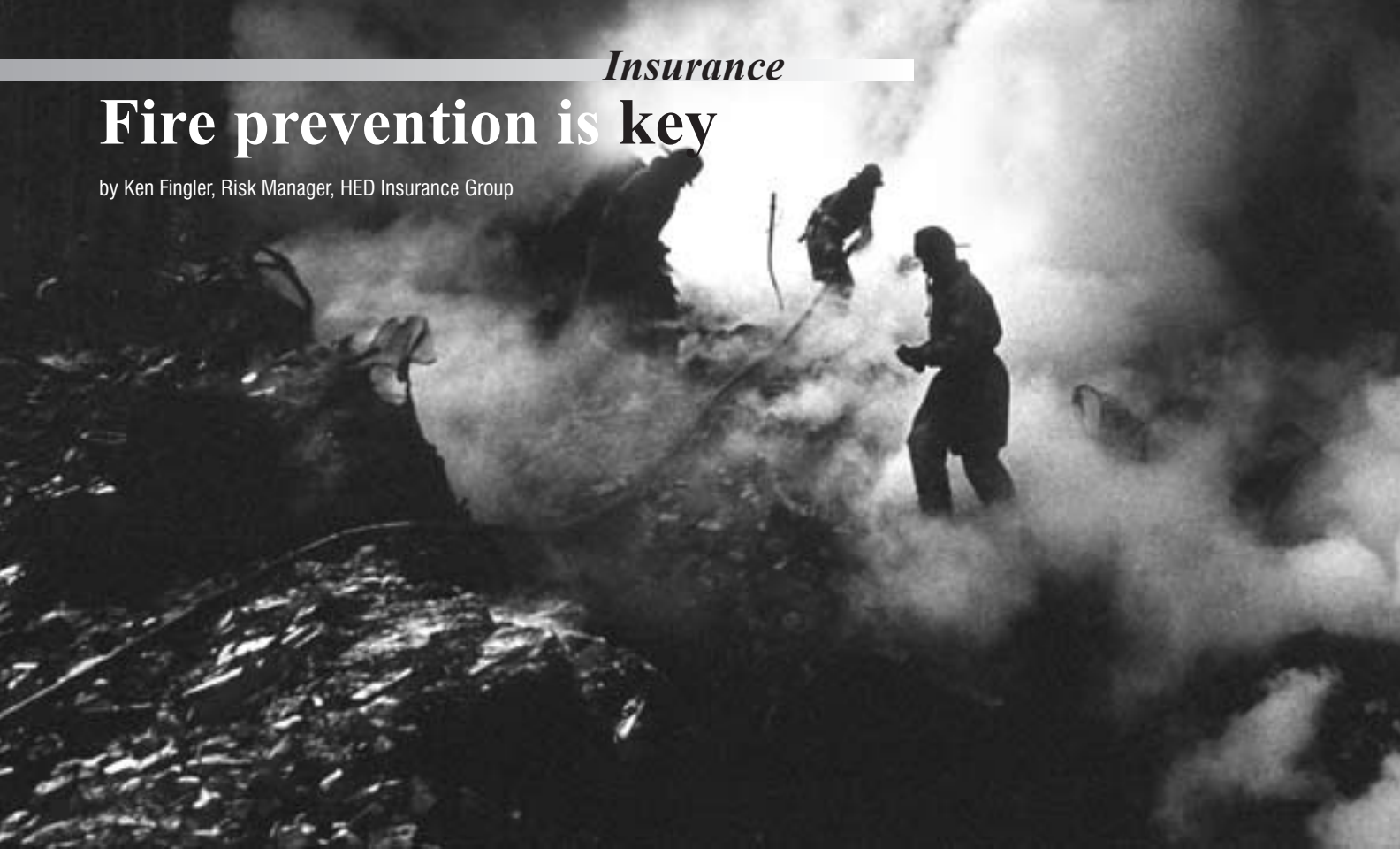
Fire prevention is key

by Ken Fingler, Risk Manager, HED Insurance Group



Every year, fires damage or destroy many buildings and take several lives in Manitoba.

The number one cause of these fires is problems with the electrical system in homes and businesses, followed closely by grease fires from cooking equipment. Municipal buildings suffered two major losses in the last year due to electrical fires.

Electrical overloading puts a strain on the electrical panels that will eventually result in a melt down and fire. The preliminary indication of overloading is heating of the electrical panel. While electrical panels, outlets and switches are normally warm to the touch under load, they should not be **HOT!**

Overloaded wiring is very dangerous. The wiring may melt and burn before the circuit breaker or fuse will operate.

Arenas, curling clubs and community halls in your municipality are usually equipped with safety equipment such as smoke and heat detectors, emergency lighting and fire extinguishers. Those with kitchens equipped with grills and deep fryers for french fries usually have stainless steel exhaust hoods and automatic wet chemical fire extinguishing systems.

While these facilities have made large investments in proper fire detection and extinguishing systems, we have found that adequate inspection and maintenance are not always provided to keep the systems operating properly.

Fires are preventable with regular inspections and maintenance.

Recommended safety procedures:

1. Check electrical systems – Check at least monthly for common hazards:

* Feel the electrical panels, plug outlets and light switches regularly.

If **HOT** to the touch, call an electrician immediately.

* Unplug portable heaters at night or when area is unattended.

These units can overheat after prolonged use and set surrounding materials on fire.

* Unplug cords from outlets with multiple (octopus) connections. Multiple connections on one line lead to overloading of the circuits.
* DO NOT use extension cords as permanent wiring.

Extension cords deteriorate and break down after prolonged use, resulting in electrical shorts and fires. Replace all damaged or frayed cords.

* DO NOT run extension cords under carpets or leave long cords wound up when plugged in. Carpet covered cords and coiled wiring cannot dissipate the heat and will eventually melt down and start to burn.
* DO NOT overload fuse panels. Fuses for lighting and wall outlet circuits should be limited to 15 amps. If fuses or circuit breakers trip frequently, the circuit may be overloaded and should be checked by an electrician.
* NEVER use water on an electrical fire. Water will conduct electricity back to you. Use a dry chemical fire extinguisher approved for Class "C" fires.
* Use caution with halogen lights. These bulbs are very hot and should have a guard over them to prevent combustibles from contacting the bulb. Many fires start when halogen lamps tip over and the hot bulbs come in contact with curtains, clothing or upholstery.

2. Automatic extinguishing systems – Should be serviced every six (6) months by a qualified contractor. Seasonal operations should be serviced at minimum once a year at the beginning of the season. (The pressure gauge should be visually checked monthly to ensure that the system pressure is still adequate.) **Note: Dry chemical systems are no longer approved and must be replaced with wet chemical systems.**

3. Kitchen exhaust hoods and ducts – Steam clean annually to prevent grease accu-

mulations in the ductwork. Seasonal operations may be cleaned every two (2) years provided the ductwork is inspected each year for signs of heavy grease accumulations. (Grease dripping down the sides of the ducts is a sure indication that it should be cleaned immediately.)

4. Hood filters – Clean monthly during operating season. The hood area behind the filters should be washed down monthly (most filters can be cleaned in a car wash).

5. Fire extinguishers – Pressure gauges should be visually checked monthly and the units should be recharged annually.

6. Smoke and heat detectors – Should be tested annually by a qualified contractor. Units with indicator lights should be visually checked monthly.

7. Emergency lighting – Tested monthly by using the test button on the side of the unit or by unplugging the unit. The battery should be replaced if it does not sustain the lights for a minimum of fifteen (15) minutes. The batteries should be completely drained annually to ensure they recharge properly.

8. **Monthly inspections** – Check facility monthly for fire and liability hazards and document on an inspection form. The facility manager or maintenance foreman can complete these monthly inspections.

Inspection forms are available in your Municipal Risk Management manual or on HED's website at www.HEDinc.com.

Should you or your staff have further questions about this subject, please contact Ken Fingler at HED Insurance Group at 1-800-265-0314 ext 279 or by email at kfingler@hedinc.com.

> "The number one cause of fires is problems with the electrical system…"

resource conserv. mb
1/4h
4c
26

hed
1/2h
bw
25