



# Fire Prevention

By Ken Fingler, Director, Risk Management, HED Insurance

Fire is one of the most useful tools known to man. When controlled, it provides heat for our homes and businesses; power for our automobiles and machinery; and heat to cook our food.

However, when fire breaks out of containment it can become incredibly destructive and even deadly in very short order.

Most fires start very small, often a simple malfunction or a careless act such as a heater, iron or coffeemaker remaining plugged in while left unattended.

The thermostats on these units may malfunction with age and stick in the 'ON' position causing the unit to overheat and burst into flame. The plastic parts burn very easily and very hot, often igniting other combustibles near by.

Cooking, especially when it involves grease, is a leading cause of fire in homes and restaurants.

While kitchen fires seldom kill people, they injure hundreds and cause millions of dollars worth of property damage each year.

Along with accidental fires caused by a wide variety of hazards, arsonists have also

plagued some areas of Manitoba. While arson used to be mainly a problem of large urban centres, it has been erupting more and more frequently in small towns and rural areas. Arson fires have progressed from hay bales to garbage cans to garages and now to large buildings.

## Keys to reducing fire losses:

- First - Prevention by safe operation of equipment and removal of hazards.
- Second – Rapid detection and alarm if a fire breaks out.
- Third – Rapid extinguishment of the fire.

If not detected and extinguished early, a small fire can spread rapidly and quickly become uncontrollable, totally destroying the entire structure and possibly spreading to adjacent structures.

We have recently seen two large wood frame arenas and an interpretive center totally destroyed by fires. These all started as very small fires that could have been extinguished easily if they had been detected early and if fire extinguishers were used right away.



Regular building inspections to detect hazards and ensure fire systems are operational along with training of staff and volunteers in the use of fire extinguishers could greatly improve prevention, detection and extinguishment of fires.

## Prevention tips:

- Pay attention to your cooking. If you have to leave the stove unattended, turn down the heat.
- Regularly clean cooking equipment, hoods, filters, and exhaust systems to prevent the accumulation of grease.
- Portable heaters can be dangerous if not used correctly. Make sure that heaters are kept away from combustibles

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