



## A Message From the Fire Chief

Summer is in full swing, and everyone is busy with indoor and outdoor activities. While we enjoy the season with all of its pleasant distractions, I want to remind you of the number one cause of fires this time of year.

How often has the doorbell rung or a child interrupted you while you were cooking, causing you to forget about the food you left sizzling on the stove – until smoke filled the house?

If this sounds familiar, I hope you'll read on, because you're running the risk of having a dangerous fire. As chief of the Portsmouth Fire, Rescue & Emergency Services, I often talk to people about the ways they can stay safe in their homes. Too often, we have that talk after they've suffered a damaging fire.

It's my hope that those of you reading this article won't have to learn the hard way. If I could give just one fire warning, I'd say "stand by your pan!" Why? Because **cooking is the leading cause of home fires**, according to the nonprofit National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Latest statistics from NFPA indicate that one out of every three home fires started in the kitchen and more than 140,000 fires a year were related to cooking.

And guess why most of these fires occur? If you said it's leaving cooking unattended, you got it right. Often when we're called to a cooking-related fire, the residents tell us they only left the kitchen for a few minutes. Sadly, that's all it takes to go from routine to disaster. The bottom line is that there's really no safe period of time for the cook to step away from a hot stove. A few key points to remember:

- Never leave cooking food on the stovetop unattended, and keep a close eye on food cooking inside the oven.
- Keep cooking areas clean and clear of combustibles (e.g. potholders, towels, rags, drapes and food packaging).
- Keep children away from cooking areas by enforcing a "kid-free zone" of three feet around the stove. Keep pets from underfoot so you do not trip while cooking.
- Never use a wet oven mitt, as it presents a scald danger if the moisture in the mitt is heated.
- Always keep a potholder, oven mitt and lid handy. If a small fire starts in a pan on the stove, put on an oven mitt and smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan. Turn off the burner. Don't remove the lid until it is completely cool. Never pour water on a grease fire and never discharge a fire extinguisher onto a pan fire, as it can spray or shoot burning grease around the kitchen, actually spreading the fire. If there is an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you and your clothing.
- If there is a microwave fire, keep the door closed and unplug the microwave. Call the fire department and make sure to have the oven serviced before you use it again. Food cooked in a microwave can be dangerously hot. Remove the lids or other coverings from microwaved food carefully to prevent steam burns.

A cooking fire can quickly turn deadly. I have seen too many homes destroyed and people killed or injured by fires that could have been easily avoided. Please heed these simple safety rules. We firefighters would like to be in your kitchen, but only when you invite us for dinner!

Thanks for your attention and let's all continue to enjoy our summer safely.

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