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News Release

For Immediate Release

Report Shows Most Fatal Fires Preventable

As the Springfield Fire Department continues to increase its focus on fire prevention, a new report shows those efforts are more important than ever. Using data collected from Springfield Fire Marshal investigative files, a report was created to find common factors of fatal fires in Springfield over the last 10 years. Among the findings, nearly all fatal fires investigated between 2003 and 2012 were completely preventable. Of the fatal fires with a determined cause, all except one were caused by human factors. These include careless smoking, improper use of space heaters, candles, children playing with matches or lighters, cooking fires, overloaded extension cords and intentionally set fires. Other findings include:

- Total number of fire fatalities: 35
- Total number of fires resulting in at least one fatality: 30
- Months during which most fatal fires occurred: February and June
- Time of day when most fatal fires occurred: 11 pm-7 am
- Hour of day when most fatal fires occurred: 4-5 am
- Average response time to fatal fire: 4 minutes, 17 seconds
- Fatal fires in which a smoke alarm failed to alert residents: 63%
- Fatal fires in which a smoke alarm is known to have been present and working: 16%
- Most common property use type: 1-or-2 family dwelling (69%)
- Average age of victim: 43
- Most common area of origin: Living room (40%)
- Most common cause of death: Smoke inhalation/asphyxia (68%)
- Most common heat source: Smoking-related (46%)
- Fatal fires in which human factors contributed: 96%
- Most common cause of ignition: Accidental (83%)

As we enter into the winter months and most common time for house fires, the Springfield Fire Department hopes citizens will use this information to recognize changes they can make to improve the safety of their homes. Here are some common mistakes seen in homes throughout Springfield:

- **Improperly discarded cigarettes:** Cigarettes should be disposed of in a deep, sturdy ashtray or metal can filled with sand. Never use makeshift ashtrays such plastic storage containers or potted plants and dispose of your cigarette butts frequently by first wetting them.
- **Smoking while on oxygen:** Pure oxygen in the presence of a fire source, such as a cigarette, can greatly enhance the spread of fire from combustible to combustible. In many cases, the oxygen infuses the clothing or skin of the individual smoking while on oxygen so the risk is present even while the oxygen deliver system is turned off. Striking a match or holding a lit cigarette anywhere near it can start a fire.

- **Improper use of space heaters:** Space heaters should be placed at least 3 feet from anything that can burn. They should also be plugged directly into the wall. Never use an extension cord to power a space heater.
- **Candle use:** Candles should also be placed at least 3 feet from anything that can burn and should be blown out when you leave the room.
- **Children playing with matches or lighters:** Children should be taught from a young age the dangers of fire. All matches, lighters and other heat sources should be kept out of their reach.
- **Cooking fires:** Always stay in the kitchen while cooking and use a timer. If you have a fire, get out of the house and call 911. Most injuries are caused when the victim tried to fight the fire themselves.
- **Overloaded extension cords:** Never overload outlets or extension cords and always follow manufacturer's instructions on electronic products.
- **Smoke alarms not present or not working:** Smoke alarms should be placed on every level of the home, inside each bedroom and outside each sleeping area. Batteries should be tested once a month and replaced once a year. Smoke alarms should be replaced every 10 years. For a free smoke alarm or battery within the city limits of Springfield, contact the Springfield Fire Department at 417-864-1500.

For more safety tips, visit the City of Springfield Fire Department's website. You may also [download the full fire fatality report](#) (pdf).

Media Only

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