

THE SIREN



West Des Moines Fire Department Newsletter

318 5th St. (515) 222-3420 - wdm.iowa.gov/government/fire-department

Message from the Fire Marshal

Happy New Year, West Des Moines! Over the course of the past year, your West Des Moines Fire Department responded to 5340 incidents, which is 614 more than 2021. Of our total responses in 2022, 50% were for medical emergencies, and the other 50% were for other types of responses such as fires, service calls, technical rescues, and hazardous material incidents. December of 2022 was our busiest month ever with 595 calls for service. I want to thank our community for your continued support and want you to know that it is an honor to serve all of you.

As we enter the new calendar year, I encourage everyone to take small steps each month to help make yourself and your family become more fire safe. Tragedy can hit when you least expect it. Take time now to become prepared for all the various types of emergencies we may face. Stay safe and healthy, and I hope you have a great 2023!



Mike Whitsell, Fire Marshal

December Incident Count - 595

Rescue & Medical – 277	Service Call – 47
Fire Alarm – 151	Hazardous Condition – 26
Good Intent – 73	Overpressure/Rupture – 2
Fire – 14	Other – 5

2022
Total Incident
Count
5340

Total Estimated Dollar Loss - \$209,700

Total Estimated Dollar Saved - \$11,278,650

Significant Incident Recap

December 2 - Apartment Fire



On Friday, December 2nd at approximately 5 p.m., West Des Moines Firefighters were called to 4225 Village Lane on report of a fire inside an apartment.

When firefighters arrived, they entered the building and found smoke coming from one of the living units. Firefighters went into the apartment and found a fire on the stove top extending into the nearby cabinets. The fire was quickly extinguished and did not extend into any other parts of the building.

One of the children home at the time remembered what they were taught recently in school by our firefighters and closed the door to the unit as they exited into the hallway. This was the right thing to do and kept smoke, heat and flames contained inside.

No injuries were reported, and a damage estimate is not available at this time. The cause of the fire was due to unattended cooking.

December 24 – Structure Fire



On Saturday, December 24 at approximately 12:00 p.m., fire crews were dispatched for a reported structure fire at 495 S. 51st St. Firefighters responded with extreme cold conditions, icy roads, and gusting winds. While enroute, Westcom dispatch indicated it was a child caller, and the involved area was in a closet.

The first apparatus on scene reported black smoke coming from the front door of a one-story townhome with occupants exiting. The incident was upgraded to a working fire - first alarm. A water supply was secured, and fire attack was initiated. Once the fire was brought under control, crews then transitioned to overhaul and salvage. With the freezing temperatures, crews were able to rotate through a warming station.

Damages are estimated at \$100,000. The cause of the fire is currently under investigation.

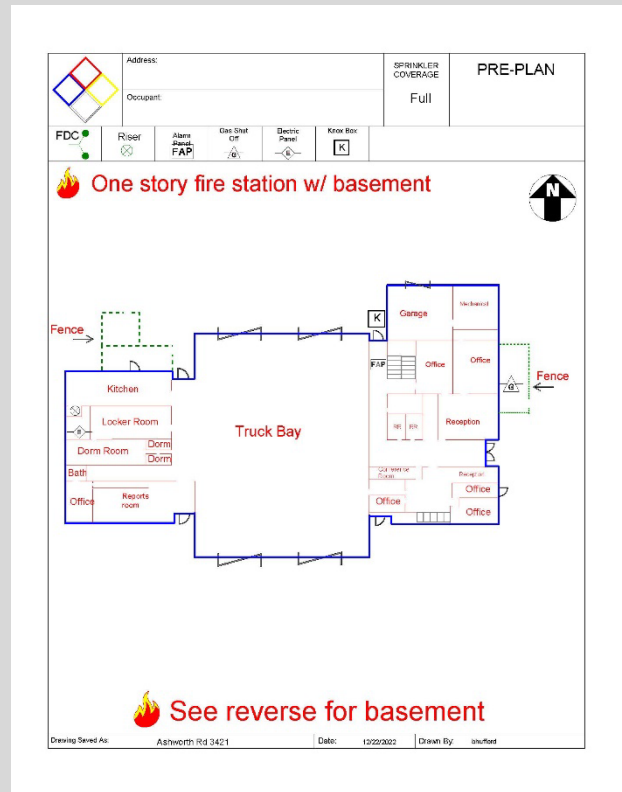
For the Community

Fire Department Preplans

Many people ask how we find our way around inside the hundreds of commercial businesses we have in West Des Moines. The West Des Moines Fire Department has a team of firefighters who conduct preplans. They enter each building and document the complete floorplan of each level in the building. They list where to find the entrances/exits, fire alarm panel, fire sprinkler risers, standpipes, fire department connections, Knox box, utilities, fire hydrants, and fire hazards.

This information is entered into our computer system which allows firefighters to view the preplan in the fire apparatus on our computer while responding to familiarize themselves with the necessary information for the building. These preplans are also used in the training environment to assist firefighters in becoming familiar with commercial buildings within their district.

Preplans help facilitate an effective response by our firefighters and minimizes risk to occupants, property, and first responders.



The Importance of Our Training

Training is the backbone of a fire department. It produces well-prepared firefighters that through repetition increases the speed of an operation and enhances proper execution while reducing injuries. Training also fosters teamwork and cooperation. Staying up to date on the latest training can make a life-or-death difference for firefighters and those we serve.

Throughout the month of December, our firefighters completed many evolutions of training. Some were classroom sessions, and some were hands-on sessions. Several of the topics trained on were salvage/overhaul, tactical ventilation, fire behavior, ice rescue, and confined space rescue.



Cooking Fires in Our Community

West Des Moines Firefighters responded to 51 cooking fires in 2022. That is almost one per week, and these were the fires that were reported. Many cooking fire go unreported.

Our goal for 2023 is to reduce the number of cooking fires to less than 50. (Zero would be ideal.) We understand people are busy and that multitasking is very common, but we really need your help to lower this number. Please *stay in the kitchen while you are cooking*. Remember these tips: “keep an eye on what you fry” and “stand by your pan”. As much as we’d like to come for dinner, we’d rather everyone be safe.



Keeping You Safe

Replace Your Carbon Monoxide Alarm if It Was Installed in or Before 2016

Every year, our firefighters respond to calls from concerned residents because of chirping carbon monoxide (CO) alarms. While it's important to call 9-1-1 if your CO alarm is sounding continuously without stopping, a CO alarm that chirps every 30 seconds is not an emergency. Most likely, it is an indication that your CO alarm has reached the end-of-life and should be replaced.

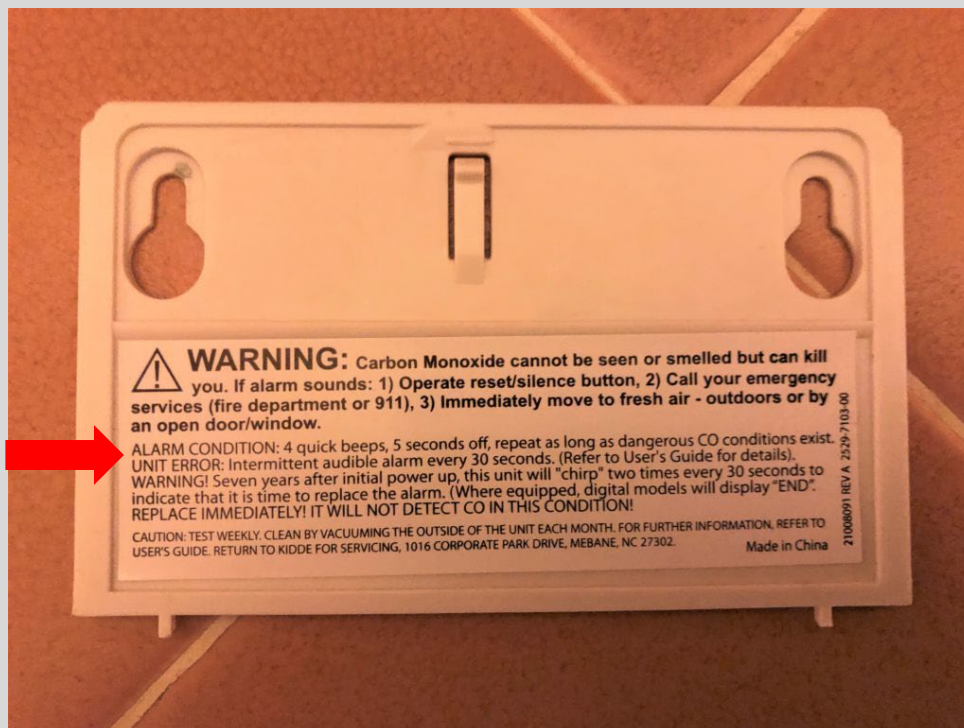
Carbon Monoxide Alarm Life Span

CO Alarms have a life expectancy of around seven years. All CO alarms produced after August 1, 2009 have an end-of-life warning notification that alerts residents the alarm should be replaced. The CO alarm will beep every 30 seconds or display ERR or END.

If a CO alarm is at the end-of-life, replacing the battery will not stop the beep. Some CO alarms have a feature that will silence the signal for 30 days, but this will not solve the issues as the CO alarm will continue to beep after the 30-day period ends.

Most carbon monoxide alarms have details on the back of the alarm as to what the different sounds mean. Make sure to read these or your owner's manual.

If your carbon monoxide alarm is beeping continuously without stopping, this could indicate that CO is present. Go outside and call 9-1-1. If you feel sudden signs of CO poisoning such as dizziness, headache, vomiting, or flu like symptoms, make sure to call 9-1-1.



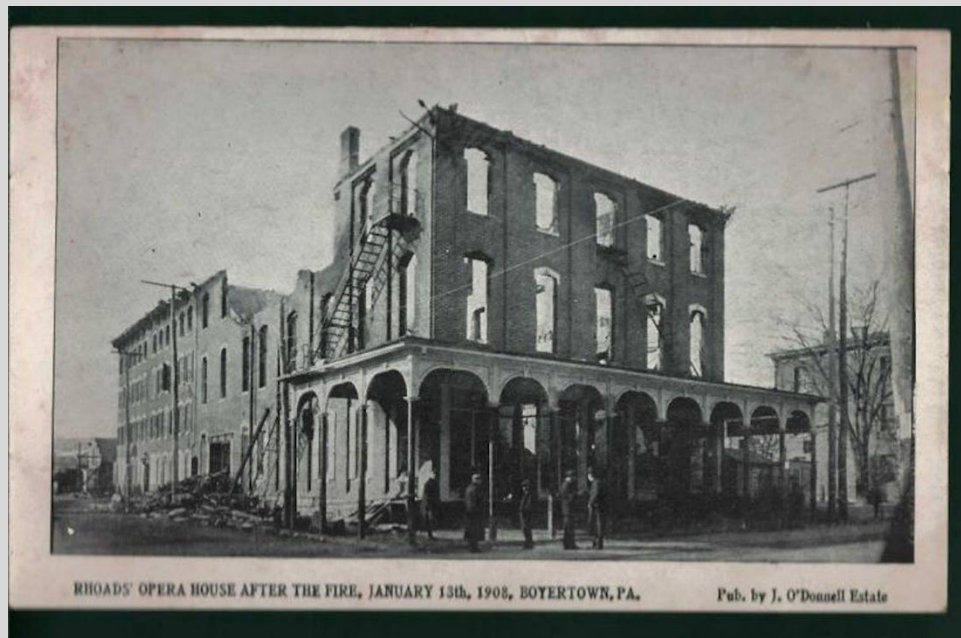
This Month in Fire History

Rhoads Opera House Fire

On the night of January 13, 1908, the Rhoads Opera House in Boyertown, Pennsylvania caught fire during a performance after a kerosene lamp was knocked over. The spreading fire ignited a mixture of lighting gas and oxygen from a malfunctioning stereopticon machine being used to present a magic lantern show at intermission. Audience members waited for the fire to be extinguished by theatre personnel, wasting the precious minutes they needed to escape safely.

The stage and auditorium were located on the second floor and the few emergency exits available were either unmarked or blocked. Two fire escapes were available but were only accessible through latched windows whose sills were located $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the floor. Of the approximately 400 men, women, and children either in attendance or associated with the performance of the play, 171 perished in various ways as they tried to escape the conflagration. In the panic to escape, many were crushed in the narrow main entrance stairway, as well as against the jammed main exit swinging doors of the second-floor auditorium.

The incident spurred the Pennsylvania legislature into passing new legislative standards for doors, landings, lighting, curtains, fire extinguishers, aisles, and marked exits. All doors were required to open outward and remain unlocked.



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