

June 2023 Edition

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

The Fire Prevention Division spent the last several months preparing the new Des Moines University Campus for final inspections. This included numerous plan reviews, site visits and meetings with contractors, architects, engineers, and ownership. Final opening inspections took place in April and May, and the campus opened in early June for staff and students. Three of their four buildings are now in use, and the fourth building is scheduled to open sometime in late July.

Des Moines University was founded in 1898 and was initially located in downtown Des Moines. They eventually built Des Moines General Hospital and moved their school to a site near 31st and Grand, just west of downtown. We are very excited they chose West Des Moines for their new campus location and look forward to future growth on their beautiful 88-acre site at 8025 Grand Avenue! I want to welcome all their staff, students, and visitors to our wonderful city!



Mike Whitsell, Fire Marshal



2023 Total Incident Count

1974

Fire Loss (YTD)

\$72,080

May Incident Count - 443

Fire – 27

Good Intent Call – 53

Over Pressure/Rupture – 0

False Alarm – 100

Rescue & Medical – 196

Severe Weather – 1

Service Call – 41

Special Incident Type – 0

Hazardous Cond. (no fire) - 25

Significant Incident Recap

May 8 – Commercial Structure Fire



West Des Moines Firefighters were dispatched to 500 S. 18th Street at 5:25 p.m. Saturday, May 6th on a report of an automatic fire alarm. As crews were responding, WestCom Dispatch upgraded the call to a confirmed structure fire based upon information they were receiving from people on site.

Engine 170 arrived on scene and saw smoke coming from the roof of a large manufacturing building, with several construction workers on the roof. Crews set up to perform fire attack and entered the building. They quickly encountered moderate smoke and found an activated sprinkler head which had extinguished the fire. Because of the fire sprinkler activation, no fire extension was found beyond the area of origin.

The fire investigation determined that construction workers on site were using an angle grinder to cut skylights into the roof. Sparks from the operating tools fell from the ceiling and ignited a 50-gallon rubber trash can inside a utility closet. The flames and heat spread to the ceiling until reaching the fire sprinkler head which activated and extinguished the fire.

The fire sprinkler system saved this building from significant damage, prevented injuries, and kept the dollar loss very low. Without the fire sprinkler system, this would have likely been a major fire that could have severely damaged this important business within our community.

May 19 – Residential Structure Fire



On Friday, May 19th, at approximately 6:43 a.m., West Des Moines Firefighters responded to a structure fire at 520 7th Street. Upon arrival, smoke was showing from the single-story house, and the call was upgraded to a working fire. Firefighters gained entry and quickly brought the fire under control. The residence was unoccupied but sustained significant smoke and fire damage.

West Des Moines Fire Investigators, along with West Des Moines Police Arson Investigators, quickly determined the fire was suspicious and gathered evidence indicating it was intentionally set inside the residence. After a joint investigation between fire and police, at approximately 3:00 p.m., West Des Moines Police arrested 21-year-old Evan Tingwald of Altoona on the following charges:

Three Counts of Burglary 3rd Degree – Class D Felony
One Count of Arson 2nd Degree – Class C Felony

Tingwald was transported to the Polk County Jail.

There were no injuries reported, and the house sustained significant damage.

In the Community

Grand Living Visit

[Grand Living at Tower Place](#), a community for seniors, hosted a breakfast for our fire crews in honor of National Firefighter Appreciation Day. Crews were able to enjoy a great breakfast and meet some of the residents of Grand Living. They also gave the residents tours of our fire apparatus and answered some great questions.



Confined Space Technician Course

Members of our Technical Rescue Team, as well as Des Moines FD, recently took part in a 40-hour Confined Space Technician course provided free of charge by the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) through grants provided by the U.S. government. Instructors provided by the IAFF were from Des Moines FD, Nashville FD, and the Fire Department of New York. Participants worked on identifying confined spaces and their hazards, including air monitoring for potential toxic or flammable atmospheres. Rescue simulations were performed to allow rescuers to safely enter a confined space with supplied air to recover a victim. The class was able to hold these simulations in actual confined spaces thanks to cooperation from [West Des Moines Public Services](#), [Martin Marietta](#), [Continental Cement](#), and the [Iowa Fire Service Training Bureau](#).



Western Village Smoke Alarm Canvass

West Des Moines Firefighters partnered with the [American Red Cross of Central Iowa](#) to help create safer homes in West Des Moines. On duty crews from Station 17, Station 18 and the Fire Prevention Division canvassed the [Western Village Mobile Home Park](#) and were able to add or replace many smoke alarms and batteries in 43 of the homes. Firefighters also discussed fire safety tips and home fire escape plans with the residents.

Thank you to the management and residents of Western Village for allowing us in your homes and to the Red Cross for the donation of smoke alarms, batteries, and volunteers.





Firefighters Train for Water Rescues

Every year, our fire department is deployed for several water rescues. The West Des Moines Fire Department, along with the Des Moines Fire Department, participated in the Swift Water Rescue Technician Course. It was extremely cold and windy just below the Saylorville Dam that day, so it was the perfect time for this type of training.

This course prepares personnel to enter moving water to perform rescues. It emphasizes identifying risks, self-rescue, and the various options for rescuing others, as well as the decision-making process required to choose the most appropriate rescue approach.

Blank Fire Safety House

Firefighters spent two weeks in May working with over 700 third grade students located within the city limits of West Des Moines on home fire safety. Children learned how to crawl low under smoke, feel a door before opening it, find two ways out of a room, identify home fire hazards, and conduct a home fire drill with a meeting place outside.

We recently had a house fire where this training was put to use. A 10-year-old, who had the training the previous year, was able to get her younger sister out of the house to a safe place and call 911. A big thank you to [Blank Children's Hospital](#) for sharing their Fire Safety House!



Keeping You Safe

Warm Weather Means Water Safety

West Des Moines has several lakes, beaches, rivers, and aquatic centers. These are all popular destinations for families to have some fun and remain cool as the temperatures rise, but drownings can happen quickly and often they are silent. Drownings can be prevented, but to prevent these tragedies, community members must follow simple water safety tips. These tips will ensure you have the most amount of fun by reducing the risks and hazards that come with being in the water.

Learn How to Swim

If you can't swim or are not a strong swimmer, keep to shallow areas. Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket whenever around the water, even at a pool or waterpark.

Swim in Designated Swimming Areas

Most beaches and lake front areas have designated times when swimming is allowed and use flags or buoys to indicate borders in which people can swim. Never swim outside of those defined areas. If possible, swim under the supervision of a qualified lifeguard.

When in Doubt, Get Out

Don't hesitate to get out of the water if something doesn't feel right. Whether the current is getting rough, rain has started to fall, or your body is not responding like you would like it to due to fatigue or muscle cramps, just leave and return another day. Do not enter the water if there is thunder and lightning.

Never Swim Alone

Swim with a buddy and never alone, even if you're a strong swimmer.

Learn CPR

Know how to save a life. West Des Moines EMS offers a selection of CPR/AED and first aid training. [Find information on classes.](#)



Don't Use Alcohol

Alcohol affects your perception of danger, making you more likely to take unnecessary risks. Alcohol also impairs your balance and coordination, all essential for swimming and boating and avoiding hazards in the water.

Have a Plan for Emergencies

Always have a plan. Tell someone where you are going and when you'll be done. Plan for every possible incident and eliminate as much uncertainty as possible. Know how to call for help.

This Month in Fire History

General Slocum Excursion Steamship Fire

On the morning of June 15, 1904, the steamboat General Slocum caught fire and sank in the East River of New York City. Approximately 1,300 people were on board, including many children. Within 20 minutes, an estimated 1,021 people died. The fire started under the main deck and was possibly caused by a discarded cigarette or match that was fueled by the straw and oily rags scattered around the room. At the time of the accident, the steamboat was on a chartered run carrying members of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church (German Americans from Little Germany, Manhattan) to a church picnic.

Testimony that would follow in the days ahead established that there were few safeguards; life vests were rotten, lifeboats were in the same state, fire drills were non-existent, and the crew was untrained to handle the panic that followed on board the Slocum.



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