

August 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

Summer has gone by fast, and soon schools and colleges will be welcoming students back from their breaks. This is a good time to review fire safety tips with your children, especially if they are heading off to college to live in a dorm, sorority, fraternity, or apartment.

My youngest son will soon be living in his first apartment while he attends Iowa State University. Recently, I told him that I would be sitting down with he and his roommates when they moved in to discuss fire safety and what they should and shouldn't do if a fire occurred in their building. He gave me a look (I can only assume it was very similar to one I used to give my parents.) and said, "Dude, we will be fine." I must admit that I kind of chuckled because he obviously knows I am a Fire Marshal, and ironically, one of his roommate's parents is a fire captain! I'm sure you all can imagine the intense presentation they will now have to sit through! There is also a high probability they will need to pass a test before I make any Costco runs for them in the future.



In all seriousness, fires do occur in schools, colleges and college living facilities. I would encourage all of you to discuss in detail with your family members these important fire safety tips from the link provided [here](#).

The West Des Moines Fire Department is currently inspecting all the elementary, junior high and high schools in our city. We will also be working with staff members at these buildings to make sure their emergency plans are up to date and communicated to all staff members before the school year begins.

I hope all of you enjoy the last few weeks of summer vacation, and always feel free to reach out to us with any fire safety questions you have.

Mike Whitsell, Fire Marshal

2023
Total Incident
Count
2847

July Incident Count - 452	
Rescue & Medical – 185	Service Call – 55
False Alarm – 89	Hazardous Condition (no fire) – 40
Good Intent Call – 50	Overpressure/Rupture – 2
Fire – 25	Special Incident Type – 6
Severe Weather - 0	

Significant Incident Recap



July 4 – Outside Fires

Firefighters responded to eight outside fires on the 4th of July. All of them were caused by improperly discarded fireworks. With the hot and dry weather conditions, we are fortunate that these fires did not cause more damage than they did or any significant injuries. As a reminder, fireworks are illegal to discharge within the city limits of West Des Moines.



July 5 – Apartment Fire

Fire crews were dispatched to 3000 University Ave. for a structure fire. Units were advised a bystander stated there was smoke coming from both windows of an apartment unit.

Crews arrived and upgraded the fire to a working fire. They pulled one handline to the unit and breached the locked door. No flames were noted, but a smoldering cereal box was on the electric stove. Crews removed the box outside and applied water. The unit was checked for fire extension and ventilated. Damages are estimated at \$600.

In the Community

Grand Living Grill Out

Firefighters got a chance to visit with the senior residents and staff at [Grand Living at Tower Place](#) when the senior living facility hosted a grill out for West Des Moines Firefighters, Medics, and Police Officers. Not only was the food great but so was the conversation with the residents.



Business Fire Safety Training

A team of employees from [Windsor Windows & Doors](#) and [Weitz](#) spent part of their morning learning ways to be fire safe in the home and in the workplace. The training concluded with employees participating in a hands-on training with fire extinguishers and how to correctly use them on a live fire.



Chest Pain Emergency Training

Chest pain, or chest discomfort, is one of the common medical emergencies we respond to. Causes of chest pain can vary from minor problems, such as indigestion or stress, to serious life-threatening emergencies, such as heart attack or pulmonary embolism.

For part of EMS training in July, firefighters refreshed their knowledge on the basics of heart anatomy, the 12 lead ECG, and signs, symptoms, and treatment of chest pain.



Happy Anniversary!

We have several members of the fire department celebrating milestone anniversaries:

Deputy Chief Greg Jones – 35 years

Captain Neil Weglarz – 15 years

Driver/Operator Tyler Wallace – 10 years

Firefighter Kyle Mikulich – 10 years



Keeping You Safe

Outdoor Fire Safety

In July, the West Des Moines Fire Department responded to quite a few outdoor fires throughout the city. With some of our warmest weeks of the summer likely yet to come, we urge the community to do what they can to prevent outdoor fires in and around your homes.

How to prevent dry weather-related fires around your home:

- Remove dead plants or bushes as soon as possible and clear roof and gutters of pine needles and leaves.
- Remove flammable wood piles and propane tanks away from homes and garage structures.
- Remove long grass, weeds or anything that can burn from around homes.
- For homes adjacent to large areas of greenbelt, consider defensible space between home and landscaping. This includes limbs that touch buildings or hang near the roof.
- Homes built on slopes should mitigate dead dry vegetation below and around structure.
- Either keep lawn hydrated or cut it short if it's brown.

How to prevent outdoor fires across the city:

- Do not light fireworks – besides being illegal, they cause serious injuries and fires.
- Dispose of smoking materials in proper receptacles and douse in water, not in planters, landscaping mulch or out of your vehicle window.
- Be sure chains and other metal parts are not dragging from your vehicle as they can throw sparks. Check your tire pressure – driving on an exposed wheel rim can cause sparks.
- Be careful driving through or parking on dry grass as hot exhaust pipes can lead to fires.

***As a reminder, open burning and recreational fires are not allowed within the city limits of West Des Moines.**



This Month in Fire History

Waldbaum's Supermarket Fire

On August 2, 1978, a fire at a Brooklyn Waldbaum's supermarket claimed the lives of six firefighters. The fire started at 8:40am when nearly 23 electricians, plumbers, etc., were renovating the building, which was open for customers, when the fire started in the mezzanine area. Shortly after 9:20am, with 20 firefighters on the roof, a crackling sound was heard, and the center portion of the roof fell into the smoke and flames plunging 12 firefighters into the flames. Six of them were rescued, but another six members died in the tragedy.

Experts reported the fire had been set in the gaps between the ceiling using newspapers and a liquid accelerant. Police arrested a man named Eric Jackson for arson. He confessed that he and two others had set the fire at about six that morning. He claimed he had been paid \$500 to do so.

The 1978 roof collapse served as a wake-up call about the dangers hidden in building construction, specifically the weaknesses of trusses. Firefighters are now taught to identify critical building characteristics from the street, to preplan buildings to determine their construction and to use extreme caution when vertically ventilating lightweight truss roofs.



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