

December 2023 Edition

# THE SIREN



West Des Moines Fire Department Newsletter

3421 Ashworth Road (515) 222-3420 - [wdm.iowa.gov/government/fire-department](http://wdm.iowa.gov/government/fire-department)

## Message from the Fire Marshal



**HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS!**

From the  
West Des Moines  
Fire Department



*I hope each of you can find joy this holiday season and spend quality time with your loved ones. Thank you for your continued support of the West Des Moines Fire Department.*

*Stay safe and healthy.*

*Mike Whitsell, Fire Marshal*

2023  
Total Incident  
Count  
**4381**

<u>November Incident Count - 373</u>	
Medical – 174	Service Call – 18
Fire – 125	Hazardous Material – 15
Cancelled/Non-Reporting – 39	Technical Rescue – 2
Total Estimated Dollar Loss - \$164,281	
Total Estimated Dollar Saved - \$1,280,610	

## Significant Incident Recap

### November 4



West Des Moines Firefighters were dispatched at 6:19 a.m. on Saturday, November 4th for a report of a house fire at 540 8th Street. While crews were en route, Westcom dispatch advised they were receiving multiple calls for flames visible from the roof. The incident was quickly upgraded to a working fire.

Upon arrival, the house was well engulfed with heavy fire and smoke. A witness advised firefighters that a female was trapped inside, so crews quickly entered the house. They immediately encountered zero visibility, excessive heat, flames, and storage that forced them to exit the house after searching half of the first floor. A defensive fire attack was then set up to keep the fire from spreading to other houses and structures.

As firefighters were still extinguishing the flames, two dogs were rescued and transported to an emergency veterinary clinic. Once the fire was extinguished, firefighters spent several hours searching the inside of the house for the occupant. This required them to remove most of the debris including the second floor that collapsed into the first floor.

After an extensive search, the female occupant was not located inside the house but was located later that evening by West Des Moines Police safe and not injured. Unfortunately, 4 dogs died in the fire, and the two rescued dogs were taken to an emergency veterinary clinic.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, a damage estimate is not available, and no injuries were reported.

We would like to thank the Clive Fire Department and Windsor Heights Fire Department for their assistance during this incident.

# For the Community

## Training – Drafting Operations

Although the majority of West Des Moines is located in Polk County, a minority of the city is in Dallas County, and small portions extend into Warren and Madison Counties. Some of these rural areas are non-hydrant areas, so firefighters need to perform drafting operations to help deliver water for a fire attack. They use portable water tanks, strainers, pumps, and hoses to draft water from remote water sources like ponds, lakes, and streams. The water is shuttled to the fire scene in tenders (water tanker truck) that carry 2000 gallons or more of water.



## West Des Moines Fire Academy

The West Des Moines Fire Department is currently holding a fire academy for new recruits. Classes started in November and will go until mid-January. The academy is headed up by Training Chief McFarland and several captains from Station 17 who assist with instructing.

Some of the initial requirements that will be covered are firefighter personal protective equipment (PPE), fire dynamics, building construction, ground ladders, and tactical ventilation.

## Holiday Fire Prevention Program

Since 1997, the West Des Moines Fire Department has conducted a fire prevention program targeting fires during the holidays. This was initially designed to make citizens aware of fires that occurred as a direct result of holiday decorations or holiday related carelessness.

For each fire we have between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, we will change one bulb from white to red. It is our goal that all the bulbs on the star stay white.

Unfortunately, after less than a week into the program, firefighters had to replace two white bulbs with red ones on the star above Station 21.

West Des Moines Firefighters responded to a house fire on Sunday that was caused by careless smoking and another house fire on Monday that was caused by a propane tank malfunction on a gas grill. While both fires only caused minor damage, these could have been significant incidents if firefighters hadn't been notified and responded quickly.

Please continue to always practice fire safety with your families. We don't want fires to happen, especially during the holiday season.



## Keeping You Safe

### Candle Fires Peak in December

More home candle fires occur in December because candles often are part of holiday decorating and traditions. Nearly one-third of us have left the room or fallen asleep while burning candles. If candles are part of your holiday celebration, candle with care.

- Do not leave candles unattended.
- Keep candles at least one foot away from anything that could burn.
- Place candles out of reach from children and pets.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy and won't tip over easily.
- Put candles on a sturdy, uncluttered surface.
- Blow out candles when you leave the room or go to bed.
- Never use a candle if oxygen is used in the home.
- Consider flameless candles which are a safer option.
- Always keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.



# This Month in Fire History

## Winecoff Hotel Fire

The Winecoff Hotel Fire occurred in Atlanta, Georgia on December 7, 1946. After beginning early in the morning, the fire quickly spread through the 15-story building, trapping people in the upper floors, and causing many to jump out of windows to their deaths. There were 119 fatalities, making this the deadliest hotel fire in U.S. history. The Winecoff Hotel was advertised as "absolutely fireproof".

The fire's point of origin was on the third-floor west hallway, where a mattress and chair had been temporarily placed in the corridor, close to the stairway to the fourth floor. One theory suggests that a dropped cigarette may have ignited the mattress or other combustibles in the corridor.

Escape from the upper floors was difficult because the building only had one exit stairway, which became impassable during the early stages of the fire. The fire spread quickly through that stairwell because many of its doors had been propped open, and there was no fire sprinkler system to stifle the flames throughout the building. In addition, the building did not have a fire alarm to notify people of the emergency as soon as the flames began.

Building and fire codes were changed across the country because of the horrific tragedy. Requirements for multiple protected means of egress and self-closing fire-resistant doors, combustible interior furnishings, automatic sprinkler systems and fire alarm systems were among the changes.



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