

April 2024 Edition

# THE SIREN



West Des Moines Fire Department Newsletter

318 5<sup>th</sup> St. (515) 222-3420 - [wdm.iowa.gov/government/fire-department](http://wdm.iowa.gov/government/fire-department)

## Message from the Fire Marshal

With the arrival of Spring, we recently participated in National Severe Weather Awareness Week with our friends at the National Weather Service. While severe weather and tornados can occur in any month, April, May, and June are the months that historically have the highest frequencies of these events. Do you and your family have a severe weather plan, and have you identified a place within your home to shelter during a tornado warning? If you own or work at a business, is there a similar plan at that location? Most importantly, have you practiced your plans with your family members and co-workers? Often, I hear people say that we are safe from tornados because we live in a large metropolitan area. That quite simply is not true, and West Des Moines has had tornados hit parts of our city in the past. Thankfully, damage was not severe, and no lives were lost.

Within the last four years, there have been three significant severe weather events that have affected our city, greater Des Moines, and Iowa. On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a derecho moved across our entire state causing catastrophic damage. Winds in Central Iowa were recorded between 75-90 mph and 140 mph in Cedar Rapids. On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, another derecho moved across Iowa that brought significant winds and 61 confirmed tornados. And on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, a catastrophic tornado touched down near Macksburg in Madison County. This tornado was rated as an EF-4, stayed on the ground for 69.5 miles, and hit the Des Moines metro cities of Winterset, Norwalk, Pleasant Hill, and Newton before finally lifting back up into the sky. Tragically, six people lost their lives and several others were injured in this event. All these storms were moving at incredible speeds of more than 60 mph. In fact, the December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, derecho was moving so fast that radar loops at times were not able to pick up the rapid formation of tornados it was producing.

In addition to creating and practicing severe weather plans, I highly encourage you to have a weather radio in your home and place of work. These radios are an essential part of the early warning process and should be programmed a few counties away from the county you live and work in, so you get notified of approaching storms well in advance. We are very fortunate to have outstanding meteorologists at our local television stations, radio stations and the National Weather Service, in addition to dedicated professionals at our various County Emergency Management Departments that we partner with. All these organizations and the members of the West Des Moines Fire Department are committed to your safety.

Stay safe and thank you for your continued support.

*Mike Whitsell, Fire Marshal*



2024  
Total Incident  
Count

**1196**

### March Incident Count - 375

Medical – 180

Service Call – 25

Fire – 118

Hazardous Material – 15

Cancelled/Non-Reporting – 32    Technical Rescue – 5

Total Estimated Dollar Loss - \$54,010

Total Estimated Dollar Saved - \$40,640,050

## Significant Incident Recap

### March 24 – Residential Fire



West Des Moines Firefighters and EMS were dispatched at 8:02 a.m. this morning to 128 1st Street on a report of a structure fire. As units were enroute, Westcom dispatch advised there were two people inside who were unable to get out.

Fire crews arrived within 3 ½ minutes to find smoke showing from the rear of the single-story house. Firefighters entered the front of the smoke-filled home without a hose line as there was an adult female inside along with an adult male who was not physically able to get out. The adult female was standing near the front door and was able to evacuate on her own, but firefighters had to move the adult male from his bed to a wheelchair before safely removing him from the house.

Once it was confirmed that no other people were inside, firefighters quickly extinguished the flames and began to ventilate the smoke from inside the house. Both occupants were transported to a local hospital by West Des Moines EMS for further evaluation. A dog, 4 cats and 2 lizards were safely removed by firefighters and animal control officers.

During the initial investigation into the cause of the fire, fire investigators learned that an unidentified male passerby observed the fire, ran into a gas station next door, grabbed a fire extinguisher that was hanging by the main entrance to the store, and then ran into the house to start extinguishing the flames prior to the firefighters' arrival. Fire investigators are currently attempting to locate this individual.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, and initial damage estimates are \$25,000.

# For the Community

## Business Fire Safety Training

Employees from [Wolfe Surgery Center](#) took part in fire safety training. They learned how to identify fire hazards, what to do in the event of a fire, how to use a fire extinguisher, and more.

Fire safety training in the workplace can help reduce the risk of fires and help employees respond quickly and efficiently in case of an emergency.



---

## Anniversary

Deputy Chief of Training Scott McFarland celebrated his 30-year anniversary with the West Des Moines Fire Department. Congratulations!



---

## Training

Sometimes our training can be very simple but still teach us valuable lessons. Crews participated in the Nine Tire Drill that helps teach orientation, self-preservation, air consumption, tool handling, area mapping, and other skills. Firefighters maneuver through this 30x30' course on their hands and knees, in full PPE, on air and with a blacked-out face piece.

This drill was designed in honor of "The Charleston 9". The Charleston Sofa Super Store fire occurred on the evening of June 18, 2007 in Charleston, SC and claimed the lives of nine firefighters.



# Keeping You Safe

## Spring Cleaning – Can You Answer “Yes” to These Fire Safety Questions?

Spring is here, and you know what that means - spring cleaning! Many people think of spring cleaning as a chance to remove dust from hard-to-reach places, throw out old food sitting in their cupboards, and go through boxes stacked in their garage. It is also a great time to evaluate your fire safety risks. Here are some things to ask yourself:

### 1. Have I cleared out any clutter from my home, especially in hallways and stairways?

Did you know that clutter provides fuel for a fire to spread? Make sure that all your exits are clear and have a clear path to them. If you have any items blocking an exit, move them immediately. This ensures your family will have good escape routes should you need to evacuate due to fire.

### 2. Have I checked my smoke and carbon monoxide alarms?

It is important that you and your family get the earliest warning in the event of a fire. Replace the batteries in your smoke alarms and test each one. Do the same with your carbon monoxide alarms. Make sure these alarms are properly placed. Smoke alarms should be placed in each sleeping area, in the hallway outside the bedrooms, and at least one on each level of your home. You should have at least one carbon monoxide alarm installed on each level of your home as well.

### 3. Is my kitchen safe?

Spills and clutter in your kitchen increase the likelihood of a fire breaking out or getting worse. You should clean up food spills right away to keep grease from collecting on your counters and stove, which can easily catch fire. Clean up any clutter on your countertops or stove tops so that if a fire does start, it won't have as much to keep it going.

### 4. Have I inspected my electrical cords?

Electrical cords can become damaged and frayed over time. This is especially true if you have pets that chew on the cords. Check each cord in your home. If they show even the slightest damage, replace them immediately. Another safe practice is to limit the number of cords running from a single outlet as this can cause overloading to occur.

### 5. Have I checked my clothes dryer?

Regularly clean your clothes dryer lint trap. Lint is highly combustible and can easily cause a fire if it isn't removed. Clean your dryer vent and hoses at least once a year to remove and prevent any excess lint buildup or blockages. Move combustible items such as boxes and clothing away from your dryer.



# This Month in Fire History

## Rhythm Club Fire

The Rhythm Club Fire occurred on April 23, 1940 in Natchez, Mississippi. Around 209 people were killed and over 200 were injured.

The club was a long, narrow building with corrugated iron walls and roof. All the windows had been boarded up to prevent people outside the club from entering or watching a performance through the windows. There were only two doors, both near the front of the building; one was locked. A band was performing to a crowd of over 700 people when the fire broke out near the entrance around 11 p.m. It is believed the fire was started by a carelessly discarded match or cigarette that quickly ignited the decorative moss on the ceiling. The building's metal construction prevented the heat from leaving the building. Many people were able to escape through the front door, while others pushed toward the back of the building, where they were unable to escape because there was no exit.

There were no building occupancy restrictions at the time of the fire. Future laws and codes would limit the number of people allowed in a structure and require doors to open outward to prevent people from being trapped. Other requirements for nightclubs now include the installation of fire protection systems, provisions for safer building finishes and decorations, provisions for better exiting systems, and for clubs to have trained crowd managers on duty.



Connect with us!

