



OREGON

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June 04, 2010

For Immediate Release

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State fire marshal releases five-year fatality review data

The Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) has released the results of a study by the Oregon Fire Fatality Review Committee (OFFRC) covering civilian fire fatalities from 2004 – 2008. During that five-year period there were 26,773 reported residential fires; 120 of these fires resulted in 138 fatalities.

The OSFM tasked the fatality review committee to look at recent fire fatality data and make recommendations to reduce residential fire fatalities in Oregon.

“Fatalities and injuries are never acceptable at any level,” insists Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Jim Walker. “Having a fire fatality review committee ensures we are getting fire service representatives and staff members with knowledge and experience to look at ways we can reduce the number of Oregonians dying in residential fires.”

A few key findings from the report include:

- Fifty-percent of all fire fatalities during this five-year period occurred in single- or two-family housing, 31% occurred in mobile homes or trailers used as residences, and 17% occurred in apartments or other multi-family housing.
- The top four causes of fatal fires are smoking material, candles, electrical, and combustibles too close to a heat source.

The committee submitted eight recommendations based on key findings in the review:

- Expanding the older adult fire prevention program. The review noted older adults accounted for the majority of fire fatalities. Sixty-eight percent of the victims were age 50 or older.

- Improve the smoke alarm program. Although smoke alarm data is complicated to gather, the review showed approximately one-third (32%) of the fatalities had no smoke alarm and an additional 17% had an alarm but it did not operate.
- Increase home fire escape planning efforts. Problems escaping were reported in 15% of the fatal fires. Problems ranged from obstacles to the exit, locked exits, or choosing an inappropriate exit route.
- Promote installation of home fire sprinklers. Based on 117 fatalities with reported sprinkler data, 112 of these fatalities (96%) had no sprinkler protection.
- Target fire prevention and life safety education to at-risk populations. Older adults and low-income households are the primary at-risk populations identified by data findings.
- Increase cigarette-caused fire education. Cigarettes continue to be the top cause of fire fatalities, accounting for 46% of the deaths.
- Monitor legislative and regulatory processes. In recent years, significant enhancements to Oregon fire safety have come about through the legislative process. It is important the OSFM continue to monitor these efforts and, where appropriate and permissible, provide advocacy and support with other elements of the state's fire service.
- Improve data collection and review. The committee found areas for improvement in data collection, such as ensuring all fire fatalities are reported to the OSFM, and increasing reporting of fire cause and socioeconomic data.

Text of the full report is available on the OSFM website at:

http://www.oregon.gov/OSP/SFM/docs/Data_Services/Fire_Fatality_Report2004-2008.pdf

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