



Minnesota Department of Public Safety

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

**FIRE DEPARTMENT**

**POCKET MEDIA GUIDE**



As someone who speaks with the news media about fires in your community, **you play a major role in communicating important fire prevention and safety information to the public.**

You help keep your community safer and save lives.

**This pocket media guide shows how to make the most of these “teachable moments”** — moments following a fire when the public’s interest and attention are high. In addition to providing the facts about the fire, you can share important information to encourage the viewer or reader to take action that could save a life — maybe even their own.

**MINNESOTA DUTY OFFICER:**

1-800-422-0798 or 651-649-5451

**ARSON HOTLINE:**

1-800-723-2020

**YOUTH FIRESETTING HELPLINE:**

1-800-500-8897

**STATE FIRE MARSHAL DIVISION:**

651-201-7200

**IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS AND NOTES**



## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

### Before the interview

- If a reporter calls unexpectedly, don't engage in an immediate interview but emphasize you want to respond as promptly as possible. Take down the reporter's info, deadline, general questions and a brief summary of what the reporter wants to discuss. Take time to prepare for the interview.
- Have an agenda before the interview begins. What do YOU want people to learn from this interview?
- Write down one to three key messages you want to share in the interview. Back them up with stats to provide credibility and examples to personalize the message.
- Look at the *Fire in Minnesota* report online at [sfm.dps.mn.gov](http://sfm.dps.mn.gov) to find valuable stats to support your key messages.
- Practice saying your responses so you feel look and feel confident.

## MEDIA INTERVIEWS

## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

- If time allows: Have someone pre-interview you. It's always helpful to have another person hear your responses so you can make adjustments if needed.
- Think about what an ideal quote would be and practice saying it out loud.

### **During the interview**

- Remember that the reporter is not your audience — the public is your audience so speak to them.
- Put the fire and safety messages in your own words so they sound natural.
- Use short sentences and don't use jargon.
- Be sure to answer the reporter's question but protect private information.
- Support your messages with stats, human anecdotes, comparisons and examples.

## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

- Don't speculate if asked. Respond with "I'm not going to speculate but what I can tell you is [share what is allowed or bridge back to a key message]."
- Never say "No comment." Explain why you can't answer (still under investigation or internal review). For example — "I can't speak to that because it's still under investigation, but what I can tell you is [bridge back to a key message or what can be shared]."
- Avoid "Yes" or "No" answers. Explain yourself briefly and factually.
- Provide emotion, not just facts, to make the interview and story compelling.
- If the question is based on faulty information or false premise, say so simply and politely.
- Take the opportunity to provide additional safety messages.
- Provide a call to action; invite people to take steps right now to protect themselves.

## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

- If you don't know the answer, say so but also tell the reporter that you'll check and get the information to them as soon as you can.
- For controversial topics: You don't always have to accept the premise of the interviewer's question. Remember the three messages you jotted down before the interview and always bridge back to them.
- If a reporter has not asked a key question that should be addressed, bring it up yourself.

### **After the interview**

- Follow-up with the reporter if they had any questions you could not answer.
- Say you can help with clarification if the reporter has any questions while writing the story.
- Ask the reporter when the story will air or run in the paper.

**Note:** Assistance with media relations is available from the Department of Public Safety. Call 651-201-7200 during business hours or the Duty Officer at 1-800-422-0798.

## ARSON FIRE TALKING POINTS

- If you have a tip or information about a possible arson fire, call the Arson Hotline at 1-800-723-2020.
- Rewards for information or assistance that leads to an arrest can reach up to \$5,000.
- To help reduce the potential for an arson fire, remove trash and overgrown brush from your property and keep items that may burn away from your home.
- Help reduce arson in your community by getting to know your neighbors and keeping an eye out for each other.
- Arson is never a victimless crime. Arson contributes to increased insurance premiums, neighborhood blight and loss of tax revenue.

### **Statistics:**

- On average, there are 1,100 incendiary fires in Minnesota every year. Incendiary refers to any intentionally set fire.

## ARSON FIRES



## CAMPFIRE AND RECREATIONAL FIRE TALKING POINTS

- Use a fire ring and build your fire at least five feet away from any combustible material.
- Keep a bucket of water nearby to put out the fire.
- Enforce a three-foot “kid-free, pet-free” zone around your outdoor fire.
- Never leave your outdoor fire unattended. A disaster can happen even if you walk away for “just a minute.”
- Check burning restrictions with the DNR before starting your outdoor fire.
- When starting a fire, use only paper and small kindling. Never use gasoline or other flammable liquids on a fire.

### **Statistics:**

- Approximately 98 percent of Minnesota wildfires are caused by humans.

## CAMPFIRES AND RECREATIONAL FIRES

# CAMPFIRE AND RECREATIONAL FIRE TALKING POINTS

## **Statistics: (continued)**

- Smokey Bear was created in 1944 and reminds us that “only you can prevent forest fires.”
- More than 50 wildfires are started each year in Minnesota by campfires that are not completely extinguished, too large or unattended.
- Make sure that the fire is completely extinguished before leaving.

## CAMPUS FIRE TALKING POINTS

- College is the first time away from home for many young people. They can stay safe by following a few simple tips:
  - Use flameless candles for decorations.
  - Stay in the kitchen while cooking.
  - Never cook while tired or under the influence.
- It's also important that students never ignore fire alarms. Get out and stay out when they sound.
- Whether you live in a dorm or in an off-campus home, make sure your exits and paths to those exits are free of clutter and that your windows easily open.
- Have a fire escape plan that includes two ways out.

### **Statistics:**

- Four out of five college fire fatalities happen in off-campus housing, according to Campus Firewatch.
- The leading causes of campus fires include cooking, arson and careless smoking.
- Campus fires are most common between 5 and 11 p.m. and on the weekends.

## CAMPUS FIRES

## **CAMPUS FIRE TALKING POINTS**

- Test smoke alarms every month.
- You have less than three minutes to escape. You need smoke alarms for early warning.
- Never disable or disconnect smoke alarms.

## CANDLE FIRE TALKING POINTS

- Never leave candles unattended.
- Anytime you use a candle, keep anything that can catch fire at least three feet away.
- You may prefer real candles, but we encourage you to consider battery operated candles to prevent a home fire. Battery operated candles look and smell realistic.
- If you choose traditional candles, remember to blow them out before leaving a room or going to sleep.
- Keep traditional candles in a sturdy container that cannot be tipped over.
- Use flashlights, not candles, for emergency lighting if the power goes out.
- Store matches and lighters up high and locked out of the reach of children.
- Teach children that candles are for adults only and not something to be played with.

### **Statistics:**

- On average, 9 percent of residential fires are started by open flames, including candles, lighters and matches.

## CANDLE FIRES

## CANDLE FIRE TALKING POINTS

- Nationally, candle fires peak in December.
- Candles and open flames are typically one of the top three causes of fires in Minnesota.

## CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM TALKING POINTS

- Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, invisible gas that is produced by incomplete combustion. Possible sources of carbon monoxide in the home include your furnace, water heater or gas range.
- Residents should have a carbon monoxide alarm or CO alarm within 10 feet of any sleeping area as well as on each level of the home.
- We recommend that the CO alarm has a digital readout and that it is placed in a location that can be seen so you're aware if there are any increases in CO levels in the home.
- Replace CO alarms every seven years or according to the manufacturer's recommendation.
- Symptoms of CO poisoning include headache, weakness, dizziness, nausea, and shortness of breath.
- If your CO alarm sounds, get outside to fresh air and call the fire department.
- Be sure to change the batteries in your CO alarm annually.
- Test your CO alarms once a month along with your smoke alarms.
- Carbon monoxide alarms can be hung low since many are plug-in with a battery back-up. Be sure to follow manufacturer's recommendations.

## CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS

## CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM TALKING POINTS

- Investigating or looking for the source of CO wastes valuable time and can put you at risk.

## COOKING FIRE TALKING POINTS

- Cooking is the leading cause of fires in Minnesota.
- Stay in the kitchen while you're cooking. If you need to leave the room, turn off the stove. Take a timer with you if you have something in the oven.
- Keep anything that can catch fire at least three feet away from appliances that get hot. Double check to be sure the stovetop is off.
- If a fire starts on the stove, smother it with a pot lid. Never throw water on a grease fire.
- Be sure to call 911 if a fire starts, even if you think you can smother the fire with the pot lid or use a fire extinguisher.
- Always have a plan to get out if you are using a fire extinguisher or trying to smother a fire. Make sure the fire is never between you and an exit.
- You've heard of distracted driving, but you can also be distracted while you cook. Pay attention when you're in the kitchen.

### **Statistics:**

- Cooking fires cause millions of dollars in damage in Minnesota each year.
- A majority of residential fires start in the kitchen.
- Most kitchen fires are typically caused by unattended equipment.

## COOKING FIRES



## FATAL FIRE TALKING POINTS AND USEFUL INFORMATION

- By law, you must give out certain incident data to reporters. This includes:
  - The date, time and place of the fire.
  - A brief description of what happened.
  - Whether anyone was arrested.
  - Names of responding agencies.
  - The name and location of any health care facility to which victims or casualties were taken.
  - The incident report number.
- This is still an active investigation. At this point, we are still determining the cause of this fire.
- This fire is being investigated by \_\_\_\_\_ along with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- **Question: Was anyone injured in the fire?**
- **If no:** No one was injured in the fire. Firefighters are still on scene working and we encourage the public to stay back and stay clear of responders and emergency vehicles.
- **If yes:** <insert number of injured> people were transported from the scene for medical attention. You will have to check with area hospitals to determine their status. At this time we are unable to release any information regarding the victims.
- **If fatality:** <insert number of fatalities> victims were found in the fire. At this time, the victims will be transported to

FATAL FIRES

# FATAL FIRE TALKING POINTS AND USEFUL INFORMATION

<Insert Medical Examiner's office name> for autopsy. Names will only be released by the Medical Examiner's office or <insert law enforcement office> after family members of the deceased have been notified. We appreciate your respect of the families involved by not publishing that information until it is formally released.

## **Other information to give reporters:**

- A list of all the fire departments on scene or estimated number of firefighters on scene.
- The amount of water flowing onto the fire by counting the lines. Generally:
  - A handline (usually off the side of the truck) is flowing around 100 gallons per minute
  - A 2-3" line (usually off the back of the truck) is flowing 250 gallons per minute
  - A deck gun (off the top of an engine) or a monitor (staked into the ground on a tripod) is flowing 300 gallons per minute
  - A ladder nozzle off the very top of the ladder usually flows a minimum of 1000 gallons per minute. . . some can flow twice that.
- Request assistance from the public in staying out of the area and allowing emergency crews space to work.
- Request that anyone with photo or video of the fire prior to the fire department's arrival give a copy to law enforcement.
- Announce appreciation of Salvation Army or Red Cross efforts in support of the firefighters and/or victims.

## GENERAL TALKING POINTS AND INFORMATION

- On average, a Minnesota fire department responds to an incident — fires, EMS calls, false alarms, mutual aid — every two minutes.
- Most fires can be prevented by following some simple tips, such as [include some tips].
- You are most vulnerable to fire where you feel safest — in your home.
- Be sure your family is prepared to respond to an emergency before it happens:
  - Practice your escape plan twice a year.
  - Test your smoke and CO alarms monthly.
  - Change your smoke and CO alarm batteries twice a year.
- When using appliances that produce heat, be sure to keep anything that can catch fire at least three feet away.
- To help prevent home fires, use our fire safety checklist that can be found at \_\_\_\_\_ (or [sfm.dps.mn.gov](http://sfm.dps.mn.gov))
- When snow falls, be sure to shovel all the exits from your home and check that hydrants near your home are clear of snow and visible for firefighters.
- If you need assistance in planning for an emergency or want more fire prevention tips, contact \_\_\_\_\_ Fire Department at \_\_\_\_\_
- This \_\_\_\_\_ (home/business/etc.) suffered significant damage which could have been greatly minimized with a sprinkler system. We encourage \_\_\_\_\_ (families/business/etc.) to consider sprinkler systems to reduce the risk dying in a fire and minimize the loss of property.

## GENERAL TALKING POINTS AND INFORMATION



## FIREWORKS TALKING POINTS

- Fireworks can be extremely dangerous — even the kind that are legal in Minnesota. Keep your holiday from turning tragic with these simple steps:
  - Only use Minnesota legal fireworks like sparklers, fountains, ground spinners and snappers.
  - Point fireworks away from people and animals.
  - Use fireworks in an open area away from trees and houses.
  - Extinguish and dispose of fireworks in a bucket of water.
  - Do not try to re-ignite a dud.
  - Always use caution around fireworks and make sure children are supervised.

### **Statistics:**

- More than 30 percent of fireworks injuries are from sparklers.
- There is an average of 73 hospital visits each year in Minnesota due to fireworks injuries.
- Approximately 40 percent of fireworks injuries each year happen to children.
- Fireworks that explode or shoot into the air are illegal in Minnesota.

**FIREWORKS**



## GRILL FIRE TALKING POINTS

- Grilling is a summer staple in Minnesota. Following some simple tips can help you make sure your summer fun doesn't turn tragic.
- Never use a grill indoors and never leave a grill unattended. A fire can happen in seconds.
- When lighting a grill, keep the top open. If it does not light in the first several attempts, wait five minutes before trying again.
- Check the grill's tubes and hoses before using a grill that has not been used in a while.
- Keep your grill clean.
- When grilling, keep the grill away from your home, deck railings and out from under eaves.

### **Statistics:**

- Most grill fires start because something that could burn was too close to the grill.
- Most home fires involving grills are started by gas grills, not charcoal grills.



## HOME HEATING FIRE TALKING POINTS

- Each year, Minnesota fire departments respond to hundreds of fires caused by home heating systems.
- To help protect your family from a heating fire, be sure to have your furnace professionally checked each year.
- Both gas and wood fireplaces should be checked and cleaned annually.
- Keep a three-foot “kid-free, pet-free zone” around any heat source.
- Anything that can catch fire should be kept three feet from portable heaters.
- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Make sure your wood stove is properly installed and ventilated.
- Turn off portable heaters when leaving the room or going to sleep.

### **Statistics:**

- Most Minnesota heating fires occur in fireplaces and chimneys.
- A majority of Minnesota heating fires happen in residential properties.



## SMOKE ALARM TALKING POINTS

- Smoke alarms save lives — but only if they work.
- While we cannot say at this point if this home had working smoke alarms, we encourage residents to be sure they have working smoke alarms and to test them monthly.
- For best protection, we recommend residents have interconnected smoke alarms on each level of the home, including the basement, and in every bedroom. Interconnected alarms all sound if one detects smoke. This will give everyone earlier warning and the most time to escape from the home.
- There are many different features available in smoke alarms. If you need assistance in choosing one for your home, call the fire department at \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.
- Are your smoke alarms starting to look more yellow than white? Not sure what year they were installed? Check the date on the back of the alarm. If it is more than 10 years old, it's time to buy a replacement. After 10 years the sensor in the alarm may not function and has a high risk of failure.
- Make sure your children are familiar with the sound of the smoke alarm and that they know to exit the home when it sounds.

### **Statistics:**

- Nationally, three out of five fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms.
- Working smoke alarms cut in half your risk of dying in a residential fire.



## SPRINKLER TALKING POINTS

- Sprinklers increase your chances of surviving a fire and reduce property damage from smoke and flames.
- This isn't Hollywood. Sprinklers don't operate the way you see in movies. Sprinkler heads are activated only by heat and each one is individually activated.
- An insurance discount of between 10 to 15 percent is usually offered for the use of sprinklers.
- This \_\_\_\_\_ (home/business/etc.) had a sprinkler system and as a result, the property damage was greatly reduced.

### **Recommendations:**

- We encourage home owners to consider installing residential sprinklers. In new construction, the cost of sprinklers is often comparable to the cost of carpet upgrades but could save you or your family in a fire.



**MINNESOTA  
STATE FIRE MARSHAL DIVISION**

[sfm.dps.mn.gov](http://sfm.dps.mn.gov)  
651-201-7200

**HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

[hsem.dps.mn.gov](http://hsem.dps.mn.gov)  
651-201-7400

**MINNESOTA  
STATE FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION**

[msfca.org](http://msfca.org)

**NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION**

[nfpa.org](http://nfpa.org)

**U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION**

[usfa.fema.gov](http://usfa.fema.gov)

**RED CROSS**

[redcross.org/prepare/disaster/home-fire](http://redcross.org/prepare/disaster/home-fire)

**NATIONAL CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY**

[campusfiresafety.org/](http://campusfiresafety.org/)

**SAFE KIDS WORLDWIDE**

[safekids.org/fire](http://safekids.org/fire)

**OTHER**

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**Minnesota Department of Public Safety**  
**State Fire Marshal Division**  
[sfm.dps.mn.gov](http://sfm.dps.mn.gov)