

NFPA suggests summer grilling tips to avoid fires

With warmer and longer days fast approaching, outdoor grilling is often a popular choice for cooking. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) today urged caution when grilling to ensure safe cookouts. According to NFPA gas-fueled and charcoal grills cause an average of 900 home structure fires and 3,500 home outdoor fires each year. Gas grills have a higher fire risk than charcoal grills. Leaks and breaks in the gas cylinder or hose are the leading cause, accounting for nearly half of gas grill fires. Placing combustibles too close to heat, and leaving cooking unattended, are the two leading causes for charcoal grill home structure fires. Half of all gas grill and charcoal grill home structure fires begin on an exterior balcony or unenclosed porch, so it is important to grill not just outside your home but well away from your home.

NFPA suggests some safety tips for outdoor grilling:

- Gas and charcoal BBQ grills must only be used outdoors. If used indoors, or in any enclosed spaces, such as tents, they pose both a fire hazard and the risk of exposing occupants to toxic gases and potential asphyxiation.
- Position the grill well away from siding, deck railings and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.
- Place the grill a safe distance from lawn games, play areas and foot traffic.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill area: declare a three-foot “safe zone” around the grill.
- Put out several long-handled grilling tools to give the chef plenty of clearance from heat and flames when flipping burgers.
- Periodically remove grease or fat buildup in trays below grill so it cannot be ignited by a hot grill.

Charcoal Grills

- Purchase the proper starter fluid and store the can out of reach of children, and away from heat sources.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling have already been ignited, and never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to get the fire going.

Gas Grills

Check the gas cylinder hose for leaks before using it for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will quickly reveal escaping propane by releasing bubbles. If you determine your grill has a gas leak, by smell or the soapy bubble test, and there is no flame:

Turn off the gas tank and grill.

If the leak stops, get the grill serviced by a professional before using it again.

If the leak does not stop, call the fire department.

- If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call the fire department. Do not attempt to move the grill.

- All gas cylinders manufactured after April 2002 must have overfill protection devices (OPD). OPDs shut off the flow of gas before capacity is reached, limiting the potential for release of propane gas if the cylinder heats up. OPDs are easily identified by their triangular-shaped hand wheel.
- Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory. Follow the manufacturers' instructions on how to set up the grill and maintain it.
- Never store propane gas cylinders in buildings or garages. If you store a gas grill inside during the winter, disconnect the cylinder and leave it outside.

NFPA has been a worldwide leader in providing fire, electrical, building, and life safety to the public since 1896. The mission of the international nonprofit organization is to reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training and education. Visit NFPA's Web site at www.nfpa.org.