

Media Release

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Fires turn deadly in winter warn Wollongong firies

It is the deadliest time of year for home fires and Wollongong fire fighters are warning local residents to identify and change any risky behaviour to reduce their chances of becoming a fire victim this winter.

New Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) statistics, launched at the start of this year's Winter Fire Safety campaign, reveal more than 60 per cent of home fire deaths occur during the cooler months of May to September.

"As we know, firefighters dread winter because there is always a spike in the number of home fires," Community Safety Coordinator David Weir said.

"But, tragically, these fires are also far more serious and are more likely to result in injuries and deaths."

FRNSW state wide data shows that of the 281* fire deaths recorded over the past 10 years, 177 occurred in a home. Of those, 63 per cent, on average, occurred in the five months from May to September. Last year, that figure was 80 per cent.

"The leading causes of these fatal home fires, the majority of which were preventable, were heaters and electrical equipment/wiring (20 per cent), smoking materials (20 per cent) and matches or lighters (5 per cent)," David Weir said.

"We also know that behaviour, such as smoking and drinking habits and lack of attention to cooking and heating, are common risk factors."

People can greatly reduce their risk of fire by identifying and changing risky behaviour and habits, including:

- Turning off heaters before going to sleep
- Keeping clothing and other flammable materials at least 1m from heaters and open fires
- Turning off electric blankets before going to sleep
- Not overloading power points
- Not leaving cooking, and other open-flame materials such as cigarettes and candles, unattended.

David Weir said the best way to identify potential risks in the home was by doing a FRNSW/GIO online home fire safety audit at www.homefiresafetyaudit.com.au

"Of course, having working smoke alarms and a practised home escape plan is also vital to your chances of surviving a house fire," also.

"A lot of people seem to adopt the 'it won't happen to me' attitude. The fact is it can. We urge you not to be complacent this winter – assess the risks and take the precautions needed to prevent a fire."

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