

The Facts: Fire Deaths & Injuries

Deaths from fires and burns are the fifth most common cause of unintentional injury deaths in the United States (CDC 2005) and the third leading cause of fatal home injury (Runyan 2004). The United State's mortality rate from fires ranks sixth among the 25 developed countries for which statistics are available (International Association for the Study of Insurance Economics 2003).

Although the number of fatalities and injuries caused by residential fires has declined gradually over the past several decades, many residential fire-related deaths remain preventable and continue to pose a significant public health problem.

Occurrence and Consequences

- On average in the United States in 2005, someone died in a fire about every 2 hours (143 minutes), and someone was injured every 29 minutes (Karter 2006).
- Four out of five U.S. fire deaths in 2005 occurred in homes (Karter 2006).
- In 2005, fire departments responded to 396,000 home fires in the United States, which claimed the lives of 3,030 people (not including firefighters) and injured another 13,825, not including firefighters (Karter 2006).
- Most victims of fires die from smoke or toxic gases and not from burns (Hall 2001).
- Smoking is the leading cause of fire-related deaths (Ahrens 2003).
- Cooking is the primary cause of residential fires (Ahrens 2003).

Costs

- In 2005, residential fires caused nearly \$7 billion in property damage (Karter 2006).
- Fire and burn injuries represent 1% of the incidence of injuries and 2% of the total costs of injuries, or \$7.5 billion each year (Finkelstein et al. 2006).
 - Males account for \$4.8 billion (64%) of the total costs of fire/burn injuries.
 - Females account for \$2.7 billion (36%) of the total costs of fire/burn injuries.



- Fatal fire and burn injuries cost \$3 billion, representing 2% of the total costs of all fatal injuries.
- Hospitalized fire and burn injuries total \$1 billion, or 1% of the total cost of all hospitalized injuries.
- Non-hospitalized fire and burn injuries cost \$3 billion, or 2% of the total cost of all non-hospitalized injuries.

Groups at Risk

Groups at increased risk of fire-related injuries and deaths include:

- Children 4 and under (CDC 1998);
- Older Adults ages 65 and older (CDC 1998);
- African Americans and Native Americans (CDC 1998);
- The poorest Americans (Istre 2001);
- Persons living in rural areas (Ahrens 2003);
- Persons living in manufactured homes or substandard housing (Runyan 1992; Parker 1993).

Risk Factors

- Approximately half of home fire deaths occur in homes without smoke alarms (Ahrens 2004).
- Most residential fires occur during the winter months (CDC 1998).
- Alcohol use contributes to an estimated 40% of residential fire deaths (Smith 1999).



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*<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/fire.htm>