

PREVENTION \* LAW ENFORCEMENT \* RESEARCH

# Maine Fire Marshal News

Maine State Fire Marshal's Office • Fire Research  
Maine Department of Public Safety  
Fire Marshal's Web Page

December 2010

Winter 2010 Vol. 2, Issue No. 8

## WELCOME!

Welcome to the fall 2010 issue of the Maine Fire Marshal News. Please take some time to read the newsletter and send us your own article for a future publication or comments in general. As always, we do appreciate the feedback on the newsletter many of you have sent over the past few years and look forward to hearing from you more in the future.



### A MESSAGE FROM THE FIRE MARSHAL

It's that time of the year to be with family and friends and enjoy a safe and happy holiday season. With that in mind I want to discuss the Three C's of the Holiday Season we need to keep in mind.

Though I certainly do not wish to diminish the holiday spirit in any way it is wise to understand three fire issues we see, all too often, during the holiday season: cooking, Christmas trees, and candles. The first issue, cooking, is a personal favorite of mine.

Cooking fires however are, and have been, the leading cause of home fires and injuries. Researchers have also observed that the number of cooking fires can rise as high as 55% higher on Christmas eve and even higher on Christmas day. Why? It sounds like an old tune but its true, people leaving the cooking alone. Share the cooking responsibilities with adult friends and family. At least they can stay in the kitchen, keep you company, and watch the stove top if you have to leave! It is the stove top where most cooking fires start due to combustible items being too close to the burner or simply over heating foods. So keep things at a safe distance and the heat at a controllable moderate level. If you do have a fire, simply put on an oven mit, grab a lid, put the lid on top of the burning pot/pan, and turn off the burner. It's simple *but you have to be there to do it*. Also remember to keep the children away from the stove top to avoid painful burn injuries.

In the big scheme of things Christmas tree fires really are not common. However, when they happen they are unbelievable in terms of how rapid and intense the fire burns and how quickly the fire can consume an entire room. Most Christmas tree fires are the result of an electrical problem or simply placing the tree too close to the fireplace or woodstove. The easiest way to prevent such an incident is to purchase an artificial tree that is labeled by the manufacturer as being fire retardant. If you do have a natural tree, be sure to purchase one that is not losing its needles when you buy it. When you get it home

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keep it watered (at least twice daily) and place it a safe distance away from anything combustible. Remember to use LED lights and be sure to check the string of lights for cracks or breaks in the line. A crack or break exposing the wires could lead to a fire. Also, don't forget to turn your tree lights off when you leave the home or go to bed at night. Finally, don't keep the tree too long. When you dispose of the tree do so outside and far away from the house.

December is the month we also see most candle fires. Data in Maine and nationwide indicates that the issue here is simply one of placement. Placing them too close to draperies or in an area where the family pet, dog or cat, might knock them over is asking for trouble. You should consider using flameless candles. They look great and have the same ambiance. If you do use real candles be sure to place them in a very sturdy holder that will not tip over and put it in an area clear of combustibles. As is the case with cooking, never leave candles unattended in a room and certainly not at night when you go to bed. Remember, children should never be left alone in a room with a candle burning.

Being simply aware of *three Cs of the holiday season*, cooking, Christmas trees, and candle hazards will help to ensure that this Christmas is another great one for family and friends alike. With that in mind, I'd like to wish you and yours, on behalf of the entire Fire Marshal's staff, a very Merry Christmas and a Safe and Happy New Year.

Sincerely,



John C. Dean  
Fire Marshal



## **IN MEMORY OF MAINE'S FIRST FIRE MARSHAL: DON BISSET**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst



Don Bisset of Jefferson has died at the age of 87. He served as State Fire Marshal from 1975 to his retirement in late 1991. He was Maine's first state Fire Marshal.

He began his 36 year state career as an inspector in 1955 in the old Division of State Fire Prevention and that bureau was later made part of the new Department of Public Safety in 1972. The bureau's name was changed in 1973 to the Office of State Fire Marshal.

Bisset, a decorated World War II Army veteran worked for the Bureau of Insurance after the war and then attended the University of Maine at Orono where he earned a BA in education. He then returned to work as an inspector and was promoted to plans examiner and then in 1975, when the Fire Marshal's Office was created, he was appointed Fire Marshal.

Fire Marshal Bisset was very much aware that the number of fires, fire deaths and injuries

were too high and this was preventable. He was a strong advocate for educating the public as well as the use of smoke detectors which gained more wide spread use during his tenure. It was not uncommon to have thirty or forty fire fatalities a year at the time Bisset became Fire Marshal. When he left the office in 1991 we were seeing fire fatalities in the high teens to lower twenties annually. This essentially represents cutting the count in half. Though I only met him once, every veteran of the Maine Fire Service has always spoken with great respect and admiration of Fire Marshal Bisset. Everyone would agree he made Maine a safer place to live and that is his legacy. He will be missed.

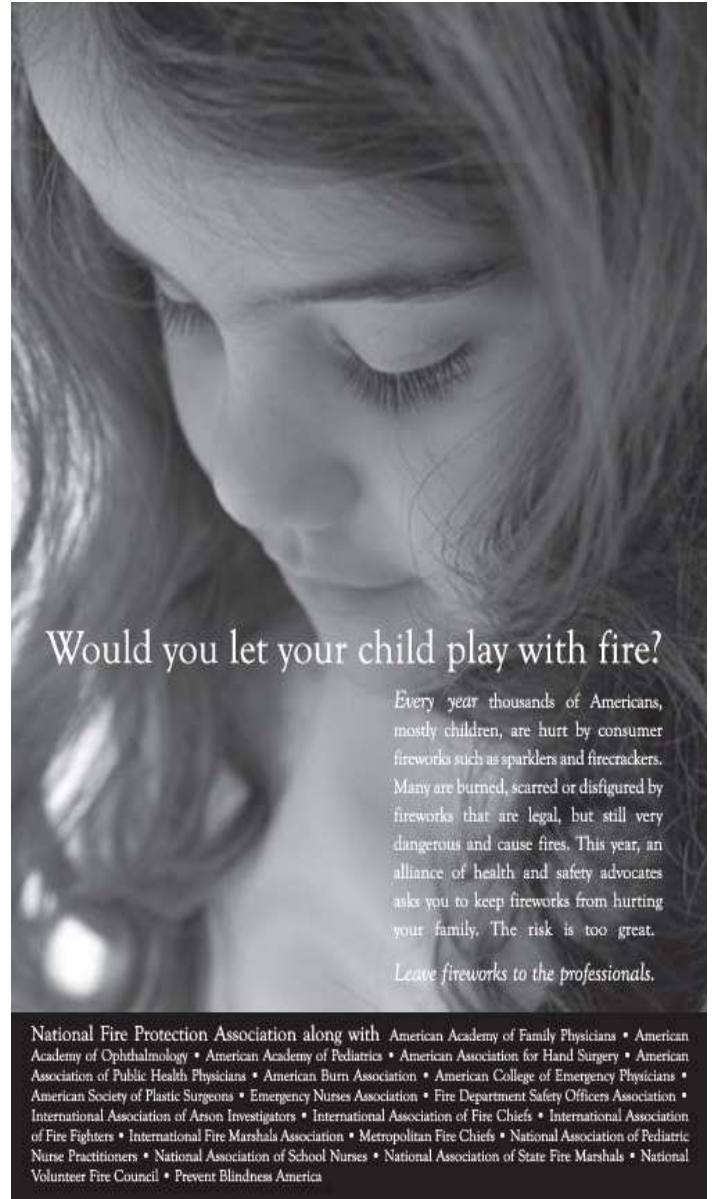
## **NIST STUDY ON CHARLESTON, S.C. SUPER SOFA STORE FIRE HAS BEEN RELEASED**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

The National Institute of Standards and Technology issued its preliminary draft report on the Charleston Super Sofa Fire that claimed the lives of nine firefighters back in 2007.

The report highlighted contributing factors starting with the fact that the store lacked a sprinkler system that would have slowed the rapid fire down in the early stages of the fire. The considerable volume of extremely combustible materials, in such a large show room vented by large windows open in the front of the show room also contributed to a bad fire. These windows allowed smoke to escape and air to feed the fire creating an environment of rapid fire spread.

The NIST study leader stated that because furniture stores typically have lots of combustible material in them, sprinkler systems are particularly critical to preventing the rapid fire spread we saw in the Charleston blaze. For more information and a summary of the report go to the October 28th issue of *FireRescue1* magazine.



Would you let your child play with fire?

Every year thousands of Americans, mostly children, are hurt by consumer fireworks such as sparklers and firecrackers. Many are burned, scarred or disfigured by fireworks that are legal, but still very dangerous and cause fires. This year, an alliance of health and safety advocates asks you to keep fireworks from hurting your family. The risk is too great.

*Leave fireworks to the professionals.*

National Fire Protection Association along with American Academy of Family Physicians • American Academy of Ophthalmology • American Academy of Pediatrics • American Association for Hand Surgery • American Association of Public Health Physicians • American Burn Association • American College of Emergency Physicians • American Society of Plastic Surgeons • Emergency Nurses Association • Fire Department Safety Officers Association • International Association of Arson Investigators • International Association of Fire Chiefs • International Association of Fire Fighters • International Fire Marshals Association • Metropolitan Fire Chiefs • National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners • National Association of School Nurses • National Association of State Fire Marshals • National Volunteer Fire Council • Prevent Blindness America

## **AFG FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY GRANT APPLICATION PERIOD TO OPEN SOON**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

The application for Fire Prevention and Safety Grants should be opening shortly. The Department of Homeland Security AFG web has issued an “FPS Get Ready” guide for potential applicants to download. The guide is designed to help applicants provide better answers to the questions about vulnerability, implementation, and evaluation. In working out your answers to these questions you’re essentially getting a head start in not only writing the grant but thinking it through more carefully.



<http://www.smokefreeforme.org/>

## **PROFILES**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

**Tim Fuller is an inspector in the Fire Marshal's Office Prevention Division. When I first started working here I spent some time with Tim doing some inspections. From that experience I learned how much more there really is to inspecting a building than just knowing the code.**

**Tim Fuller started with the State Fire Marshal's Office in 1989 as a fire inspector. During that same period he has been a member of the Clinton Maine Fire Department representing the Clinton Firefighters Association.**

**As an inspector for the Maine Fire Marshal, Tim is both flexible and extremely knowledgeable. He understands fire issues and applicable codes for any type of occupancy there is. When I spent a day with Tim, he inspected some home day cares, a day care center, some foster homes, and an older adult residential housing complex. While observing Tim that afternoon, I gained an introductory level understanding of how fixed mitigation systems, i.e. sprinklers, smoke alarms and exit lighting are only of value *if* the facility is also routinely practicing escape planning, keeping exit routes clear, keeping areas free of combustible excessive and poorly placed combustible materials. It was clear Tim had two pictures in his mind: what the given physical environment was now and, how it would be (for the occupants) if a fire were to start.**

**Aside from his technical knowledge, intuition about the occupancies he inspects and what would happen if a fire occurred, Tim**

**exercised considerable tact and was extremely gracious in working with the various facility owners or managers. In some instances these individuals, like me, didn't know why a hallway needed to be clear or a bureau shouldn't be placed in front of a window in a foster home. Like me, they were looking at**

**"Tim Fuller demonstrated the artful skill of explanation and reason that facilitated a quick and lasting remedy to a problem. His skill in this regard makes the facilities he visits safer for the inhabitants."**

**the situation as it existed at that moment. To me it didn't seem like a problem? To Tim, who again was looking at it from both the present and potential fire perspective, there was a clear and reasonable difference. Enforcing regulations isn't easy and it often comes down to how the inspector explains *why* there are certain requirements. Tim Fuller demonstrated the artful skill of explanation and reason that facilitated a quick and lasting remedy to a problem. His skill in this regard makes the facilities he visits safer for the inhabitants.**

**Tim also understands fire department operations and suppression strategies. He has been a member of Clinton Fire & Rescue for years and currently serves as President of the Clinton Firefighters Association (see picture). Clinton Fire and Rescue, like all good fire departments, makes a good effort to provide its constituents with fire prevention and safety education.**



**Tim is an avid basketball fan and loves the Celtics in addition to being a Ham radio operator. He lives with his wife Ellen in Clinton, Maine.**

## MEFIRS – Maine Fire Incident Reporting System

	Current Statistics 2010*	Final Statistics for 2009
Total Calls:	41,058	78,221
Fire Calls:	2,103	3,809**
EMS Calls:	26,574	50,996
All others:	12,381	23,416
Fire Departments Reporting	158	190
Total Fire Dollar Loss	\$17,608,107	\$39,788,836
Civilian Fire Related Injuries	26	40
Fire Service Fire Related Injuries	17	30
Civilian Fire Related Deaths	8***	14***
Fire Service Fire Related Deaths	0***	1***

\* The Fire Marshal's Office will have all data for 2010 in by June-July of 2011.

\*\* Represents single incidents only.

\*\*\* Based on SFMO Investigations

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### Data Analysis Experiences

Here are two types of analyses the Fire Marshal's Office provided to two different types of organizations using NFIRS reporting data which demonstrate the value of quality data.

#### *Fire Station Location Analysis*

In the first situation the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) was contacted by a local department asking for assistance in providing data analysis that could help them with a fire station location issue. The department was in discussions with the city regarding the location of a new fire station. The departments position was centered on the fact that the response times to a developing area of the community was substandard and a new station was needed in this area to meet the demand of services to this area. The city administration believed the response time data it had acquired showed that the average response times to the area in question were consistent with response times associated with other communities statewide. However, it appeared that the city had used a comparative analysis approach that used both career *and volunteer* departments in arriving at a statewide average response time. Using data within the Maine Fire Incident Reporting System (MEFIRS) the OSFM conducted a comparative analysis of similar type (career) departments and showed that the city's response times had been skewed by four to six minutes because of the times reported from rural volunteer departments. An entire NFIRS generated report was developed using comparable circumstances. The OSFM was informed by this department that by using the comparable data they were able to illustrate to the city that the cities data was not comparable and the need for a new station at the given location was warranted. At this time, plans are moving forward for the construction of the new station that will be used to cover the developing section of the community.

#### *Assistance to the American Red Cross for Budget & Strategy Development*

The second recent successful use of MEFIRS data was provided to a regional administrative office of the American Red Cross that provides disaster relief services to five counties within Maine. The request was made by the Red Cross in an effort to develop an operating budget. Following the request for assistance in budgeting, the OSFM conducted an analysis of incident types that the local chapters of the Red Cross could use to provide disaster assistance in general, to their respective counties. This request provides an excellent example of the value and capabilities to provide quality data to agencies and organizations that may not be fire service in nature, but work in conjunction with emergency services providers.

*“Fight Fire with Facts”*

# **MAINE FIREWATCH**

By Richard E. Taylor, Sr. Research and Planning Analyst

Maine is on track to having the fewest fire fatalities since we began keeping track of them in 1945. However, since the publication of this newsletter this past September we've had four fires that claimed the lives of three older adults and one teenager. The causes of those fires are too familiar and too preventable.

Two older adults were killed in fires resulting from their clothing catching fire while cooking. The teenager was killed when someone attempted to re-start a campfire with gasoline. These cooking and campfire scenarios are not uncommon and have frequently been the focus of many fire safety public service announcements.

The Outlaws Motorcycle Club, lost their clubhouse in Dayton to a fire the cause of which appeared to be accidental. The fire below, believed to be an arson, destroyed this lakeside home on the New Hampshire Maine border.



Two other arson related fires occurred in Norway and Biddeford, Maine. The Norway fire occurred in a single-family dwelling and though the living room of the home had apparently been doused in gasoline the fire department was still able to save the home. In fact, Norway Fire Chief Dennis Yates stated that the fire was contained to the living room and the remainder of the house sustained little damage at all. That's a good save considering the way the fire

started. You can see a picture of the home in the photo below.



Norway Firefighters suppress a home fire

Arson is believed to be the cause in this more spectacular fire in Biddeford. A fire at a four story apartment building with several units in a relatively crowded area of Biddeford turned into a big fire. As you can see from the photo below, this fire had considerably devastating potential. The three alarm blaze brought more than 100 firefighters from as far away as the Portland area in an effort to keep the fire from spreading and consuming a large portion of the neighborhood. There had been a series of smaller fires in the area prior to this larger conflagration. The Red Cross responded to the event and provided assistance to thirteen individuals who had resided in the apartment.



## This Month in Fire History

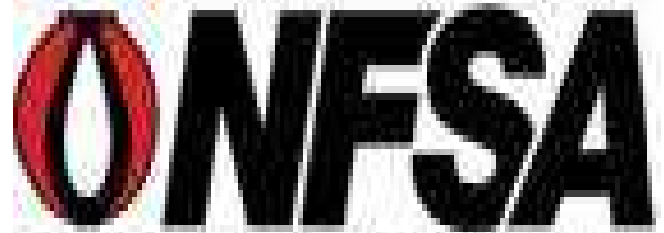
Arcadia Hotel fire kills 28, Boston (MA), 1913  
Brooklyn Theater fire kills 295, Brooklyn (NY), 1876  
Winecoff Hotel fire kills 119, Atlanta (GA), 1946  
Nursing home fire kills 20, Fountaintown (IN), 1964  
Babbs Switch School fire kills 36, Hobart (OK), 1924  
Richmond Theater fire kills 70 including governor,  
Richmond (VA), 1811  
Iroquois Theater fire kills 602, Chicago (IL), 1903  
Stouffer's Inn conference center fire kills 26, Harrison  
(NY), 1980  
State school for mentally retarded fire kills 15, Ellisville  
(MS), 1978  
Great New York Fire, loss worth \$461million (2003  
dollars), New York (NY), 1835  
Stockyard cold storage fire kills 21 firefighters, Chicago  
(IL), 1910

### Our Lady of the Angels school fire, Chicago 1958

This fire may perhaps be the most tragic fire in American history for two reasons: 92 children were killed and they were killed because essentially the school was not legally bound to comply with all 1958 fire safety codes due to a **grandfather clause** in the 1949 standards. Each classroom door had a glass transom above it, which provided ventilation into the corridor and also permitted flames and smoke to enter once heat broke the glass. The school had one fire escape. The building had no automatic fire alarm, no rate-of-rise heat detectors, no direct alarm connection to the fire department, no fire-resistant stairwells, and no heavy-duty fire doors from the stairwells to the second floor corridor. At the time, fire sprinklers were primarily found in factories or in newer schools, and the modern smoke detector had not yet become commercially available (that didn't happen until 1969). All these inadequacies were known in 1958 but not corrected.



Our Lady of Angels Fire, December 5, 1958 Chicago, Illinois



The Voice of the Fire Sprinkler Industry

<http://www.nfsa.org/>

## UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

*If you have an announcement or upcoming event you'd like to post in this newsletter please feel free to forward it to us using the contact information below. The next issue will be in March 2011.*

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The **Maine Fire Marshal News** is an electronic publication of the Maine State Fire Marshal's Office.

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To submit articles for publication contact the Fire Marshal's Office at (207) 626-3870 and ask to speak with the editors. You may also e-mail an article or comment to [Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov](mailto:Richard.e.taylor@maine.gov)

All articles are subject to an editorial staff review prior to inclusion. For a copy of submission requirements contact the editorial staff.

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