

Candle Safety

Introduction

200 deaths.
1,540 injuries.
\$200 million in direct property loss.

That was the estimated toll taken by fires started by candles in 2004 as reported by the National Fire Protection Association in a publication titled Home Candle Fires (Ahrens:11/06).

While they can provide a relaxing atmosphere and compliment a home's décor, candles can also greatly increase the chance of property damage, injury or death from fire as evidenced by the above estimates.



According to the National Candle Association, the 1990's witnessed a surge in the popularity of candles, which are now found in 7 out of 10 homes. With that increased popularity, however, has come a downside. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that the number of residential fires caused by candles rose from

6,800 in 1990 to 23,400 in 2001. The number of fires has somewhat declined since then but remains well above 1990 figures.

Loss Scenario

A unit owner placed several lit candles on the kitchen counter next to an open window and left the room to vacuum. A short time later the smoke detector activated and the unit owner found the curtains and surrounding cabinets on fire. The kitchen was a total loss, and heat and water damage extended to the adjoining dining and family rooms as well as an adjacent unit.

Had the unit owner closed the window or secured the curtain, this loss could have been prevented.

Need More Information?

Additional information on candles and fire safety is available through the NFPA (www.nfpa.org) and the NCA (www.candles.org). A variety of product safety information as well as recent and past product recalls is available through the CPSC (www.cpsc.gov).

Associations may request additional information on this topic by contacting CAU's Loss Control Department.

Candle Fire Facts

The NFPA publication reveals some interesting trends regarding candle fires during a five-year period from 2000-2004, including:

- 54% of home candle fires occurred when some form of combustible material was left or came too close to a candle. In 20% of those cases, the candle was unattended.
- 4% of fires were started by people (usually children) playing with candles.
- Falling asleep was a factor in 12% of home candle fires and 25% of the associated deaths.
- 38% of home candle fires started in the bedroom, resulting in 35% of the associated deaths.
- December (14%) had almost twice the number of home candle fires of an average month (8%).
- Christmas Day was the peak day of the year for home candle fires. Christmas Eve ranked second and New Year's Day was third.

Candles and Fire Safety

A 2001 pilot study by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated that nearly 85% of candle fires could be prevented if people followed three basic safety rules:

1. Never leave a burning candle unattended.
2. Never burn a candle on or near anything that might catch fire.
3. Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.

ASTM International, a voluntary standards organization, has published five standards covering fire safety, emissions, labeling requirements, standard terminology and candle accessories. The intent of these standards is to reduce the frequency of candle fires, and NCA members have pledged to manufacture candles in accordance with these standards.

There have been over 100 product recalls since 1990 involving candles and candle accessories. Most of the recalls are due to fire hazards. Information concerning product recalls is available at www.cpsc.gov.

A Safer Alternative

An electric candle warmer is a safer alternative to burning a candle. These devices, similar to crock pots, use low heat instead of an open flame to melt candle wax and allow the candle's scent to permeate throughout a space. These devices also eliminate the production of soot, which over time, can damage ceilings, walls, floors and personal belongings. Candle warmers are readily available at department and specialty stores. Only purchase a candle warmer that is Underwriters Laboratory® (UL) listed.

What CAU Recommends:

- Consider using a UL-listed candle warmer instead of a lit candle.

If you do burn candles:

- Keep at least one foot, in all directions, between candles and combustibles such as decorations, bedding or curtains.
- Make sure that curtains are secured and cannot be blown over the candle by wind.
- Keep candles in a place where they cannot be knocked over by a pet.
- Keep candles, lighters and matches out of the reach of children.
- Never leave a lit candle unattended and never leave a child alone in a room with a lit candle.
- Burn candles on sturdy, noncombustible holders that cannot tip over easily and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Keep candle wicks trimmed to 1/4" and extinguish them when there is 2" of wax remaining or 1/2" if the candle is in a container.
- Use flashlights during a power outage and never carry a lit candle.
- Extinguish all candles before you leave the house or go to bed.
- Purchase candles that are properly labeled and made by a reputable manufacturer belonging to the NCA.