

Don't Let a Fire Ruin Your Summer Fun

Ah, there it is — the unmistakable aroma of hot dogs, hamburgers and lots of other yummy foods sizzling on the grill. Nothing says SUMMER IS HERE better than an estimated 92 million American grill-owning households cranking up their backyard barbecues for festive family gatherings, community celebrations or just a quiet dinner on the backyard patio.

Residential fires in America caused 14,700 injuries, 2,470 deaths and \$12.4 billion in damages in 2012. While statistically smaller by comparison, grill fires tallied 140 injuries, 10 deaths and \$96 million in property damage annually from 2007 to 2011, according to reports from the National Fire Protection Association.

Grills, hibachis and barbecues on residential properties continue to be a high fire risk, according to the United States Fire Administration, and the agency urges Americans to be especially mindful now during the grilling season. So take a second to review this list of precautions and prevent a grill or propane fire from ruining your summer fun:

Rules of Engagement

- Start smart by following all manufacturer's instructions and warnings when assembling and/or operating your grill.
- Only grill outside in open areas – not in a garage; under eaves or other enclosures; or near siding, deck railings or anything flammable.
- Set up your grill away from playing fields, lawn games or any other high-traffic areas.

It's Show Time!

- Keep the lid open when lighting a propane grill to prevent an explosion from gas buildup. Turn off and wait at least 10 minutes to relight if the burners blow out.
- Kids under five suffer 25-percent of all grill burns. Stay close to your grill when in use, and keep children clear with a three-foot "kid-free zone."
- Use long-handled tools to prevent burns, and tuck in loose clothing.
- Douse flare-ups with spritzes of water on a charcoal grill, but not on a gas grill. For a gas grill, turn the gas down or off.
- Have baking soda on hand to control a more serious grease fire, and know where a fire extinguisher is, just in case.
- When done cooking, shut off the gas supply, then turn the burners to "off."

Keeping It All Together

- Mechanical failure is the leading cause of grill fires. So check your grill and propane tank regularly for wear, particularly for cracked hoses, broken fittings, dents and other corrosion.

- Remove grease or fat buildup from trays below the grill regularly.
- Rotten egg, skunk or dead animal smells can mean propane is leaking; turn off the supply valve if you can do so safely, tell everyone to leave the area and call the fire department.
- Transport propane cylinders securely and upright in a well-ventilated area of your vehicle, and never leave a bottle inside the car on a hot day.
- Never store propane indoors or in an enclosed area such as a basement, garage, shed or tent.

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. You must consult with an attorney for the application of the law to your specific circumstances.

R. Michael Shickich is the founder of the Injury Law Firm located in Casper. The focus of his practice is personal injury and wrongful death cases.

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