

Message from the Alberta Fire Commissioner

Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere!

October 7, 2018, marks the beginning of this year's Fire Prevention Week. This year's campaign, "Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere," works to educate people about three basic but essential steps to take to reduce the likelihood of having a fire — and how to escape safely in the event of one.

LOOK

Look for places where a fire could start. Identify potential fire hazards and take care of them.

LISTEN

Listen for the sound of the smoke alarm. You could have only minutes to escape safely once the smoke alarm sounds. When you hear the alarm, go to your outside meeting place, which should be a safe distance from the home and where everyone should know to meet.

LEARN

Learn two ways out of every room and make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily and are free of clutter.

In many ways, fire safety practices are quite simple. If we keep things that will burn (fuels such as paper, peat moss, wood, compost, etc.), away from things that are hot enough to ignite those things, even slowly, it will prevent ignition – and with no ignition, we have no fire. This is the fundamental premise of the Alberta Fire Code: to separate fuel and ignition source.

One of the problems we see regularly is that people are unaware of the things around them that may ignite. An example is the soil that plants are grown in. These plants require soil that provides nutrients and contains things such as compost and peat moss, both of which are organic fuels. When someone places a cigarette in a plant's pot, the fire does not occur instantly, so individuals may not realize until much later that they have started a fire. The unextinguished cigarette smoulders inside the soil, building up heat and searching for more fuel and oxygen. As it heats up, sometimes over several hours, it heats the organic material in the soil to its ignition point, causing a visible fire to start. If there are other combustible materials in the vicinity, they will be ignited and the fire will grow, often going unnoticed until significant damage has been done.

The same concern arises with cigarette butts thrown from vehicles. The butt continues to smoulder and often gets blown into the ditch at the side of the road where it heats dry grass to its ignition point. In Alberta, we know from experience that this may result in rapid fire spread, often exacerbated by dry conditions and strong winds. These entirely preventable fires have caused major damage to property and livestock, and have placed firefighters in danger.

Fire, like all other risks and hazards, is something that all Albertans, adults and children, need to be aware of at all times, in the home, at work and outdoors.

As we do every Fire Prevention Week, we want to remind everyone to clean and test the smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms in their house monthly.

Testing your smoke alarm with smoke from a blown out candle is the preferred way of verifying its function, carbon monoxide alarms work on different, time-weighted exposure principles and can only be tested by pushing the “test” button as per manufacturer’s instructions.

We strongly encourage all Albertans to work with your partners, children, family members, tenants and neighbours, to draft, discuss, and practise their fire escape plans. These plans need to be specific to your residence and take into account its type and location, as well as the usability of the identified escape routes. Your local fire department and the Office of the Fire Commissioner are always ready and willing to answer any fire safety questions and provide additional guidance upon request. Our goal is the same as yours: to ensure you are prepared in the event of a fire and to help everyone get out safely.

Yours in safety,

Kevan D. Jess
Fire Commissioner