Fire Prevention – Something We Can All Live With.

Almost everyone connects Halloween with the month of October. But, what about Fire Prevention? You might wonder what October and fire prevention have in common. The answer is Fire Prevention Week.

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Prepare for Cold Weather

By John Dougan,
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It may not seem that way right now, but fall and winter cold will soon wrap itself around areas of the country that expect such weather and some that do not. With that cold will come water damage caused by frozen pipes UNLESS we properly prepare our facilities and establish processes that will prevent these occurrences. This free webinar will focus on ways you can winterize your church facility and
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Almost everyone connects Halloween with the month of October. But, what about Fire Prevention? You might wonder what October and fire prevention have in common. The answer is Fire Prevention Week.

Since 1925, each year a proclamation has been signed by the United States President officially designating Fire Prevention to be the first full week of October that includes the 9th.

What is so special about October 9th? It is the day when the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 did the most damage. The fire actually started in the late evening of October 8, 1871 and was controlled two days later when rain began to fall. While the Great Chicago Fire is the best-known fire of the time, it wasn’t the biggest. That distinction belongs to the Peshtigo, Wisconsin Fire. Strangely enough, this fire also started October 8, 1871. An Internet search on the history of Fire Prevention Week, the Chicago fire and the Peshtigo fire will provide many interesting facts and fallacies about each of these events.

Fire Prevention Week doesn’t receive as much attention as Halloween. Halloween is a commercial bonanza for businesses, while Fire Prevention Week was and is an educational focused event. An annual theme is chosen and becomes the educational subject for the year, the week, and the day. In 2012 it was “Have 2 Ways Out!” In 2013 the theme was “Prevent Kitchen Fires.” The theme for this year is “Smoke Alarms Save Lives: Test Yours Every Month”.

Smoke alarms save lives, arousing sleeping residents from slumber to find smoke filling the home. Many fire victims die from toxic fumes long before the fire consumes the room.

Smoke Alarm Guidelines

- Alarms should be located in every bedroom.
- Alarms should be placed in hallways outside sleeping areas.
- An alarm should be on each level of the building, including basements and attics.
- Placement on upper floors should be near the stairs.
- It is best to have all alarms interconnected, so that when one sounds they all sound.
- Both types of detectors (Ionization and Photoelectric) should be used.
- Smoke alarms should be replaced at least every ten years.
- All smoke alarms should be tested once a month.
- If your smoke alarm is connected to the electrical system, it should also have a battery backup.

There are two types of smoke alarms – Ionization and Photoelectric. The Ionization type is generally more responsive to active burning fires. A Photoelectric generally responds to smoke sooner. Many of the smoke alarms today have both types in one unit.

Smoke alarms should be replaced at least every ten years. Technology changes, improvements are made, and your
life could well depend on it. Today's alarms are better and more reliable.

I have an old fire alarm that is a bell just over five inches in diameter. Although it is no longer in use, in its heyday it was loud enough to be effective and best of all it didn’t need electricity to operate. It is spring powered with a lead pin-activating device that melts quickly. The drawback is that the fire has to get close enough and hot enough to melt the pin. Today’s smoke detectors would alert individuals of potential fire long before my old antique unit.

Francis Upton, an associate of Thomas Edison, invented the first electric fire alarm in 1890. The first electric heat and smoke detector was patented in 1902. When in the last hundred years was yours made? Check the manufacture date. Replace it if it is ten years old or older. Many have an expiration date that should be followed.

Current smoke detectors are more reliable. They tend to have less false alerts. Some have a temporary silence or mute button for use in the kitchen where false alarms do happen. If you would like to interconnect your smoke detectors, but don’t want to do a lot of rewiring, check out the wireless units that are available.

Smoke alarms are becoming more of a standard item for homes, due in part to building codes that require them in new construction. The cost of smoke detectors has been greatly reduced, and more people realize the benefits of having them. An inherent problem that comes with popularity is that the detectors are installed and then forgotten. This is especially true of smoke detectors that are connected to the electrical system and do not have a battery. We entrust our lives to these devices. Shouldn’t a regular check-up be part of a regular maintenance to do list?

The school year has just begun. Would you like to see some excitement generated about Fire Prevention Week? Perhaps you’re a teacher looking for a theme for a week. It really doesn’t matter who you are or what you do. Do something to bring attention to Fire Prevention Week and fire prevention throughout the year. Fire prevention something we can all live with.

References:
http://www.usfa.fema.gov/campaigns/smokealarms/alarms/
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoke_detector

by: BILL COCHARN

35 Years of service as a member of the Angwin Volunteer Fire Department