

March 2006

Alcohol & Drug Abuse Relates to Elevated Fire Deaths

All evidence points to the fact that people who abuse alcohol and other drugs are a growing high-risk fire group. Alcohol-impaired fire fatalities exhibit an age pattern that is quite the opposite of other fire fatality patterns in that the very young and old are not the higher risk. It is also noted that smoking combined with alcohol use, creates an even greater risk for fire injuries and fatalities. Studies have shown that more than half of all alcohol-impaired fire deaths were the result of fires caused by careless smoking. The United States Fire Administration reports that smokers consume more alcohol than do non-smokers, heavy drinking tends to be associated with heavy smoking, and a large majority of alcoholics are smokers.

“Most people are aware that smoking is bad for the health of the smoker and for the health of people around the smoker, but one of the dangers that people often forget is the relationship between smoking and the potential for fire, especially when combined with alcohol,” says **John Reich, Deputy Director of the SC Division of Fire and Life Safety**. “Careless smoking is a leading cause of fire deaths in **South Carolina** and causes about 1,000 deaths each year in North America, and over \$400 million in dollar loss,” he adds.

Fires are predictable, preventable occurrences. **South Carolinians** have control of their fire safety by:

- Making sure their homes are equipped with working smoke alarms and testing those alarms at least monthly
- Providing a deep-dish ashtray with a solid base, never allowing it to rest on the arm of upholstered furniture
- Dousing cigarettes or ashtray contents with water before disposing of them in the trash
- Being especially careful if alcohol or other drugs are also being used while smoking
- Never smoking in bed or allowing other family members or guests in your home to smoke in bed

“In today’s times of modern technology, many people are also looking towards taking advantage of residential sprinkler systems. These systems are designed to put the fire out before it can become a problem and is a relatively inexpensive way to provide and even greater safety environment for your family”, adds **Deputy Director Reich**.