



NOVEMBER 2022

BACK STEP TALKS

Holiday Safety

A Sad Case for Residential Sprinklers

At approximately 03:30 hours, on Monday, January 19, 2015, a fire in a single family residential dwelling occurred at 936 Childs Point Road, Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Maryland. The initial units that responded to the fire were the Anne Arundel County Fire Department, Annapolis Fire Department, and U.S. Naval Academy Fire Department responded. The incident quickly escalated to a 4th Alarm assignment. The initial units identified the scene with a two-story occupied single-family dwelling that was approximately 16,386 square feet in size, and which sustained a complete loss to the structure and contents. The damage is estimated at approximately \$18 Million dollars. The two adult homeowners and their four grandchildren did not escape and died during the fire.



***Above:** This 16,000 square foot home in Anne Arundel County was destroyed by fire as result of a live Christmas tree. The fire claimed the lives of 6 individuals and caused an estimated \$18 million dollars in damage.*

This was a very sad start to 2015 for all Marylanders. The homeowners and four of their grandchildren had spent the day at Medieval Times. The kids called the home the castle. In all best intentions the homeowners had a 15-foot cut Christmas tree in the great room which was opened-up to the second floor. The tree had been up since November and as you may have imagined had dried out over this time frame. After an extensive investigation it was determined that the electrical outlet under the Christmas tree had failed and ignited the plastic and tree skirt under the tree and extending upward into the tree. The intensive and quickly developing fire trapped all of the occupants from escaping. The home had a monitored fire alarm system

but was not protected by a fire sprinkler system.

2015 was also going to be a difficult time for the fire service in the General Assembly. The assembly had just come back to session within two weeks prior to this fire. The residential sprinkler bill passed in 2012 but had a grace period which came due in 2015 so we all knew that certain legislators were coming after residential sprinklers. This fire became our springboard to rally the Maryland Fire Service and fight to keep residential sprinklers in all new homes across the state. From the ashes of this fire we found a voice that would amplify our message of support of this very important legislation and forming a personal

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A Sad Case for Residential Sprinklers *(cont.)*

message of why it was so important to keep residential sprinklers in place. As she stood by us, and as a family advocate for fire sprinklers in Annapolis during the hearings, Sher Grogg who was the sister to the homeowner quickly became part of Common Voices and helped us defeat House Bill 19 which would have repealed the requirement for home fire sprinklers in all new home construction. Over the days prior to the hearings, we shot video from the fire scene of recognized Maryland Fire Service personnel to include Richard Smith from Talbot County whose passion to see this bill defeated was infectious to the rest of us. In the end as you well know House Bill 19 was defeated and sprinklers have been saving hundreds of lives across the state since then. In looking back, would this fire had made a difference if it had not happened during this time of year and in a town where the debate over residential sprinklers was going on. For me and the rest of us we would not have wanted to see this fire take the lives of Don and Sandra Pyle,

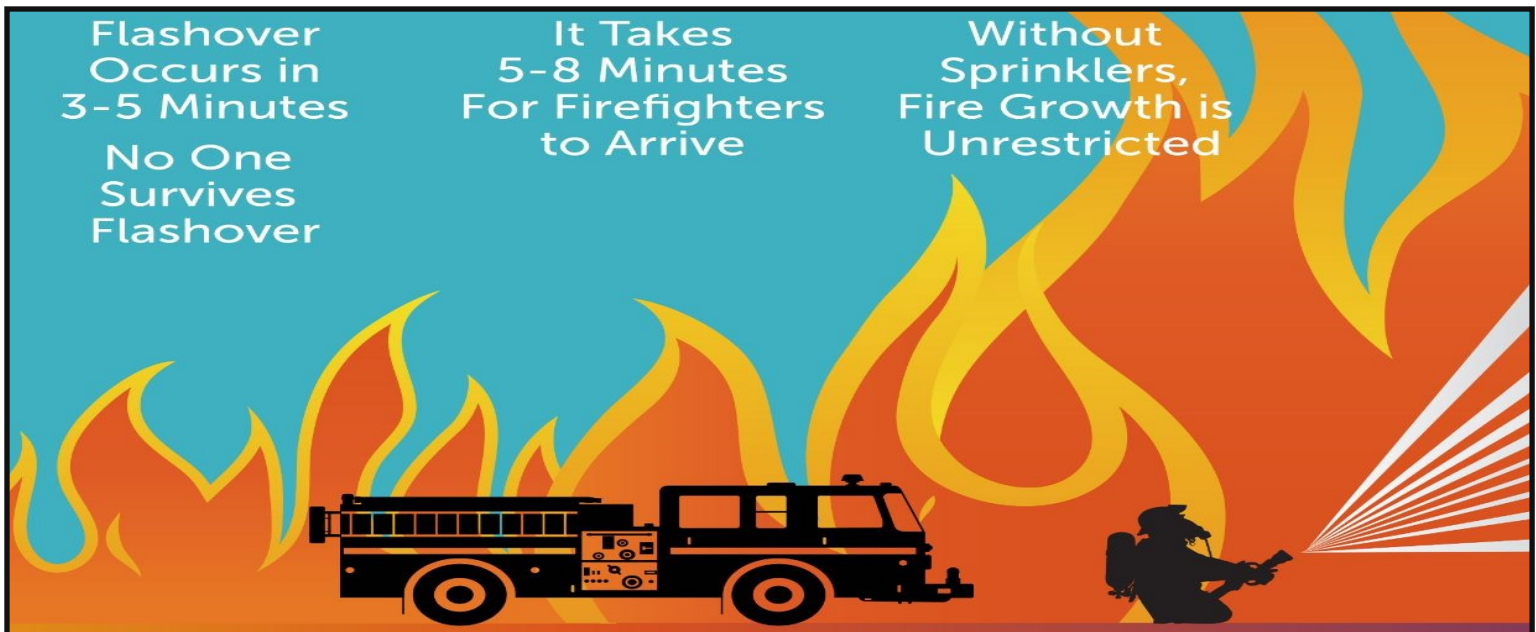


Above: The fire claimed the lives of Don and Sandra Pyle, Lexi Boone, Katie Boone, Charlotte Boone, and Wes Boone.

Lexi Boone, 8; Katie Boone, 7; Charlotte Boone, 8; and Wes Boone 6. May they continue to rest peacefully.

These six individuals will never know that by dying in this fire the number of lives that have been saved since then by residential sprinklers. I think about this fire almost every day and the impact that it had on the families, the firefighters,

investigators, the public and the general assembly at that time. I believe that we could have defeated HB 19 without this fire because when we all work together in Annapolis we are a force and we are heard. Please continue to pray for this family, the Maryland Fire Service, those in the general assembly who had the courage to defeat this bill and save the lives of our citizens and our firefighters.



As the Holidays Approach

With the upcoming holiday months, fire departments must understand that they will run into different religious traditions that use candles and other flammable items.

One example of this is the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, which is celebrated in the fall to commemorate the harvest season and the 40 years of wandering through the desert. During the festive holiday, those celebrating the holiday build a “Sukkah” which is tent like structure with a roof of tree branches so that the celebrants can see the stars in the sky. Meals are eaten in the Sukkah and some religious members will even sleep in the Sukkah. Candles and sometimes electrical outlets are temporarily used inside the Sukkah.



Above: A Jewish Sukkah built to celebrate the harvest season.

Thanksgiving has become another holiday with added dangers for the fire services as we have started to enjoy deep fried turkey. Depending on the location of the deep fryer and the moisture condition of the turkey, we might have more than the turkey burning.



Above: With the trend of deep frying turkeys, a new fire hazard has been introduced to the holiday season.

Channukah is the Jewish Festival of Lights and for eight nights candles are lit on a Hanukkah Menorah. The Menorah is a center piece of the holiday and is usually placed in a location where it can be seen by people walking by. The candles are not blown out, they burn until the wax is gone.



Above: A Jewish Hanukkah Menorah utilizing candles that burn till they self extinguish.

African Americans celebrate the holiday of Kwanzaa and light candles each night of the 7-night celebration of African roots. Kwanzaa celebrates the seven core

principles of Unity of Family, Self-determination, Collective Work, Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith.



Above: The African American communities celebrate Kwanzaa with candles burning seven nights.

Christmas is another holiday that uses candles in different ways adding to the danger of fires. Candles are used for decoration and adornment throughout the home. In addition, as the Christmas tree dries up they can become kindling for a rapid spreading fire.

Be safe and let's enjoy the upcoming holidays!



*Every year,
candles cause
more than
10,000 home
fires.*

*5,000 occur in
December.*

Taking Care of Ourselves During the Holidays

The holiday season is a time to be with family and friends, enjoy good times, and reflect on the past year's positive events. It is also one of the most stressful times of the year for folks. There is a noticeable increase in suicide attempts, suicides, and domestic violence calls "family feuds". First Responders already have a stressful job, but the holidays bring about unique stress levels due to the increase in calls, trying to purchase gifts and get ready for the holidays, and the stress of being away from our loved ones. Because of this, First Responders need to make a conscious effort to take care of ourselves and our partners during the holidays. Here are a few tips to help get us through the holiday season.

- Plan your holidays events early. Do not wait until the last minute to purchase gifts, plan the family gathering, or make travel arrangements.



Above: Take care of yourself so that you can take care of others and enjoy the holiday season.

- Talk with your partner and/or station family. Don't keep things bottled up.
- Meditate. Everyone seems to be in a rushing mode during the

holidays. Take a few minutes of quiet time for yourself.

- Get to get between 7 to 9 hours of sleep to restore you physically and mentally.
- Turn off the news. Reading today's mostly negative news stories is stressful. Get news from reliable sources and don't feed into rumors and social media.
- Enjoy some time with your pet. Research has shown that petting an animal can reduce stress and blood pressure and improve your mood. Pets can sense when you are not feeling well.

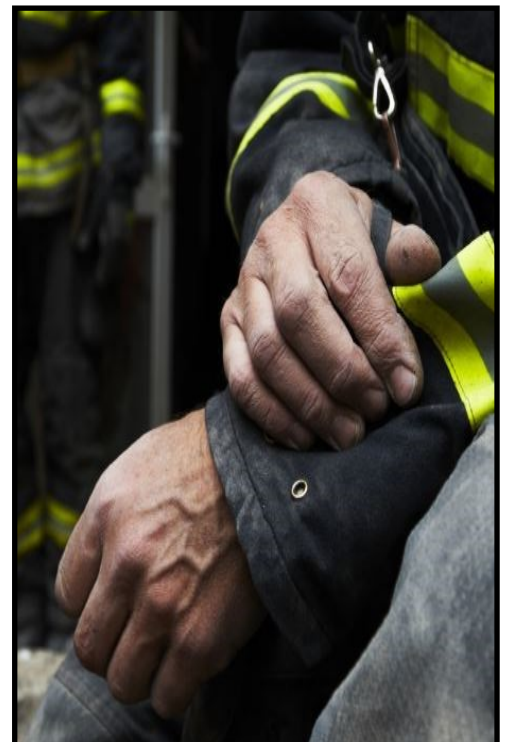
So, this holiday season, enjoy the parties and get together but take time for yourself, your family, and your station family. And if the need arises, reach out to others for support.

Key First Responder Stress Responses

- Fear
- Grief
- Sorrow
- Disbelief
- Numbness
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anguish



UWHealth



Setting the Standard for the Holiday Safety Season

The holiday season is right around the corner and many communities take joy in seeing the Christmas light displays, Breakfasts with Santa, train gardens, or Santa Runs hosted by their local fire department. For many fire departments, these events are an annual tradition many of their members embrace and anticipate due to their connection with their community. These events also allow us to lead by example with the safety practices we use in our firehouse regarding holiday decorations.

Practicing what we preach when it comes to fire safety and prevention in our firehouses will set the example for the residents of our communities to do the same in their houses!

Holiday Don'ts

- Overload outlets
- Utilize multiple extension cords for a single strand
- Put flammable decorations near ignition or heat sources
- Use actual candles for decorations unless they will always be attended when they are lit. LED candles are a much safer option
- Block ingress or egress points with lights, decorations, or displays

Holiday Do's

- Inspect light strands before hanging them up to make sure the wiring is intact and no bulb outlets are exposed
- Plug exterior lights into a GFCI outlet
- Utilize artificial trees – call volume and day-to-day business of a firehouse can lead to a natural tree being unintentionally neglected and not watered appropriately, leading to a fire hazard
- Use the correct lights for the correct location – UL ratings and weather/moisture resistance are different between indoor light strands and outdoor light strands.
- Ensure that power cords and light strands are out of walkways and areas of heavy foot traffic to prevent slips, trips, and falls
- Turn the tree lights off at bedtime or when no one will be at the station
- Practice safe ladder technique when stringing lights up on the exterior of the building or in high interior spaces
- Use decorations that are flame resistant
- Utilize clips to hang lights rather than nails to avoid splitting the strand covering
- Use outlets that are on different breakers to distribute the electrical load



Turkey Fryer Safety

As the United States enters the holiday season many citizens will be using the newest tradition of Turkey Frying instead of the traditional oven cooking giving us the amazing odors throughout the house. The society of today is ease and time expedient bringing the newest threat of fire during the holidays. With the potential to cause fire and serious injury, some organizations such as U.L. and NFPA advise against using fryers for turkey. If those in the agency jurisdiction plan to deep fry, be sure to know how to safely use the fryer. The precautions below will protect your citizens, guests and homes.

- Make sure the turkey is thawed and dry before cooking. Skip the stuffing when frying turkey, and avoid water-based marinades. Ice or water that mixes into the hot oil can cause flare-ups.
- Watch the weather. Never operate a fryer outdoors in the rain or snow.
- Place the fryer on a level surface, leaving 2 feet between the tank and the burner, and avoid moving it once it's in use.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions to avoid overfilling. Oil can ignite when it makes contact with the burner.
- Choose a smaller turkey for frying. A bird that's 8 to 10 pounds is best; pass on turkeys over 12 pounds.
- Never leave fryers unattended.
- Purchase a fryer with temperature controls, and watch the oil temperature carefully. Cooking oil that is heated beyond its smoke point can catch fire. If you notice the oil is smoking, turn the fryer off.
- Turn off the burner before lowering the turkey into the oil. Once the turkey is submerged, turn the burner on.
- Wear goggles to shield your eyes, use oven mitts to protect your hands and arms and keep an "ABC" or grease-rated fire extinguisher close by. Do not use water or a garden hose on a fire related to turkey fryers.
- Keep children and pets away from the fryer at all times.
- Once finished, carefully remove the pot from the burner, place it on a level surface and cover to let the oil cool overnight before disposing.
- Opt for an oil-less fryer. This uses infrared heat, rather than oil, to cook the turkey.
- Never use a fryer in a garage.



Maryland Fire Chiefs Association



Leadership Training Weekend 2022

When: December 10th—08:00 to 15:30 December 11th—08:00 to 12:00

Where: Ocean City Fontainebleau Resort, 10100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, MD

Who Should Attend: If you are a leader in your department (Fire Chief, Chief Officer, Company Officer, Senior Leader, or you aspire to be, you need to be here!

Why Must I Be There: Because this course is Facilitated by today's fire service leaders with real life expertise and because you won't get a more thorough education anywhere.

Saturday, December 10th

COURSE DESCRIPTION: DEVELOPING FIREFIGHTERS AND FIRE OFFICERS TO PERFORM OPTIMALLY AT FIRES AND EMERGENCIES Jason Brezler, Founder, Leadership Under Fire / FDNY Lieutenant / Major, USMC Reserves Though undoubtedly influenced by science, firefighting is principally an applied art and human endeavor. Leaders have an awesome responsibility to develop firefighters and fire officers to perform optimally at fires and emergencies. In addition to developing tactical and technical proficiency, leaders actively cultivate the mental, emotional, and moral qualities of firefighters and fire officers. This seminar will identify obstacles to optimal human performance at fires and emergencies while also highlighting practices that have proven effective in preparing both individuals and units to perform at their best under pressure. Jason Brezler uniquely blends his experience leading and developing Marines and FDNY members with his rigorous study of human performance. This seminar will educate and encourage leaders who are passionate about improving unit and department performance at fires and emergencies.

Sunday, December 11th

COURSE DESCRIPTION: JAN. 6, 2021: EVENTS AT THE U.S. CAPITOL, AS TOLD BY DC FIRE/EMS Chief Daniel McCoy, Deputy Fire Chief of Homeland Security and Special Operations District of Columbia Fire & EMS Department Chief McCoy will lead a conversation regarding how DC Fire/EMS prepares and responds to large scale, high profile public events, including responding to the events on January 6, 2021, as DC Fire & EMS personnel treated and transported hundreds of patients in the midst of hostile crowds. DC's Bravest worked alongside both Metropolitan Police and U.S. Capitol Police, treating more than 50 injured officers.

Contact the Ocean City Fontainebleau Resort 1-800-638-2100 to make your reservations and use the code "Maryland Fire Chiefs Association". Reservations must be made by November 10, 2022. The room rate is \$79 per night + taxes/fees. Attendees who have a valid Maryland volunteer fire, rescue or EMS affiliation and who travels more than 50 miles one way are eligible to have lodging cost covered by the SAFER grant. Attendees will need to place the room on hold with a credit card. If you do not show (both days), your card will be charged

Register at MFRI's Seminar Page: <https://www.mfri.org/training/seminars/>



Tree Lot Safety: A Mix of Public Education and Safety Practices

The bottom line during the holiday season at many Fire Stations throughout the state is that Tree Sales is a very lucrative fund-raising event. I know my station nets more than \$15,000 in about a 30-day timespan. From the Friday after Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve members of the community flock to the firehouse lot to support our operation and share the holiday spirit around the popping warmth of the tree lot fire barrel. I think it's important to insert here that Christmas Tree fires are not particularly common; the NFPA reports that on average between 2015 and 2019 only 160 homes each year report a Christmas tree fire; however almost every one of those fires resulted in multiple life losses because of the increased fire load and annually more than \$10,000,000.00 in property damage across the United States.

The public loves coming to see us and support us but do we take full advantage of this one-on-one contact to help ensure that FD supporter will have a safe holiday? Starting with the delivery of the bulk order, once the inventory is unloaded and stored for the upcoming operation,

confirmation on when the live tree was cut and watering down the greens to help them stay fresh should happen the same day, and once to twice a week until sold out. Next everyone staffing the lot should have some training on tree safety, including use of the saw to complete the 2" fresh cut, have a water can on site to keep the lots fire barrel protected. Also make sure your rookies or new probationary members know how to safely and securely attach the tree to the car so it makes it home and doesn't become a hazard to the other drivers on the road.

Having a brief safety talk the family, especially the young children reminding them to water the tree daily, turn off lights when not in use, review emergency exit plans that may change with tree positioning, and lastly remove the tree as soon after the holiday as possible. Remember over 50% of all tree fires occur in the month of January. We will never have better contact with the community than the time they spend on the tree lot, make sure that you and your members make the most of the opportunity.

Resources



[Back Step Talks](#)
[Back Issues](#)

[Maryland](#)
[Fire Chiefs](#)



[Final Report on AA](#)
[Christmas Tree Fire](#)

[AA County Fatal Fire](#)
[News Report](#)



[First Responder](#)
[Wellness](#)

[Depression in First](#)
[Responders](#)



[Fire Advocate](#)
[Sher Grogg](#)

[Live Tree](#)
[Burn Video](#)



79

The number of fallen
firefighters through
October 31, 2022.

US Fire Administration

988

SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE