

Fire officials warn of dangers of apartment fires

By Richard Williams
Reporter

"Stupidity is the reason most apartment fires start," said College Station Fire Marshal Harry Davis.

"Someone will be cooking and a friend will stop by," Davis said. "Next thing you know they've gone off for a beer, and they leave the grease cooking on the stove. The best way to stop this type of fire is to slow down and use common sense."

To help inform the public about different fire prevention measures during National Fire Prevention Week, which ends Saturday, the College Station Fire Department will have a booth set up in Post Oak Mall today and Saturday, where they will hand out fire-prevention literature.

Davis said cooking is the No. 1 cause of apartment fires in College Station.

Statistics from the State Fire Marshal's office also list cooking as

the leading cause of apartment fires in Texas.

Dennis Gissell, an information specialist with the state fire marshal's office, said that in 1986 there were

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4,163 apartment fires in Texas — 1,290 of those cooking-related. He said the incendiary-suspicious category ranks second with 707 fires while smoking caused 387.

Charles L. Page, division head of the Fire Protection Training Division of the Texas Engineering Extension Service, said grease fires are

probably the largest single type of cooking fires.

A grease fire usually starts when someone is cooking with a skillet and leaves it unattended, Page said. The

grease in the pan gets too hot and a fire erupts.

He said the problem can be compounded if the person tries to remove the pan before putting out the fire.

"Often they will try to pick up the skillet and take it outside," Page said. "What happens is the flame is

fanned back toward them, and it could catch their clothing on fire. The handle also can become too hot to hold and they drop it on the rug. This could start an even bigger fire. Never pick up a skillet on fire."

Page said that when a grease fire occurs one should turn off the heat and put a lid on the pan. It is better, he said, to use a long-handled fork instead of a hand to place the lid on the pan.

If the lid must be placed on the pan without the use of the fork, it is important that the person place the lid on the skillet from the side.

"Never put a lid straight down on a skillet," he said. "This forces the fire to come out around the sides and might burn the wrist or catch clothing on fire."

Putting the lid on from one side will help prevent this, he said.

If nothing is available to smother the fire out, Page said baking soda could be used.

Page said many people use flour to extinguish the fire, but he cautions against this method. He said flour has the potential to catch on fire.

Water is another item that should not be used to put out grease fires. Putting water on a grease fire could cause it to splatter and spread.

Common sense can also be used to prevent smoking-related fires, he said.

The amount of fires caused by smoking rises when alcohol is involved; when people drink, they get careless with their cigarette, Page said.

If an apartment fire does break out, smoke detectors can provide a valuable service by alerting residents at an earlier stage of the fire. Smoke detectors are an item both Page and Davis recommend purchasing.

Page said most apartments in Bryan-College Station have either the battery- or household current-powered detectors.

Page said the household current units might be better detectors, but he said if the circuit they are on has been shut off, the detectors will not work. For this reason, he said he recommends having both types.

The cost of a battery-powered unit is under \$10, Page said.

Once a fire starts, response time is increased by people with thoughtless parking habits.

Davis said people who park in fire lanes could be towed.

During the weekend of the Texas A&M-Louisiana State University football game, 70 tickets were issued to vehicles parked in fire lanes, Davis said, and about 20 cars were towed from fire lanes.

The fine for parking in a fire lane in College Station is \$27.

Students need to use common sense to stop fires from happening, Davis said. He also said apartment residents need to remember that everyone who lives in an apartment complex depends on everyone else for their safety.

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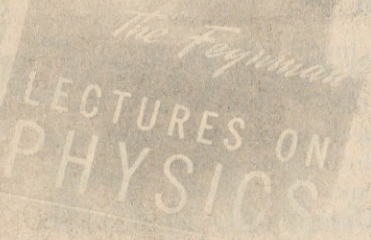
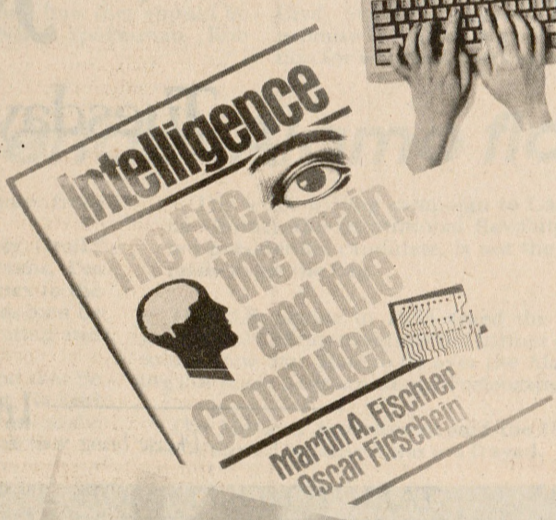
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