Hoarding and Fire: Reducing the Risk

Do you have a person in your life who may be a hoarder? Hoarding is a condition where a person has persistent difficulty discarding personal possessions. The large amount of possessions fill the home and prevent the normal use of the space. Living space becomes cluttered and unusable. Therein lies the real problem. Hoarding brings distress and emotional health concerns as well dangers from the threat of fires.

Why Hoarding Increases Fire Risks:
- Cooking is unsafe if flammable items are close to the stove or oven.
- Heating units may be too close to things that can burn. They might also be placed on unstable surfaces. If a heat tips over into a pile, it can cause a fire.
- Electrical wiring may be old or worn from the weight of piles. Pests could chew on wires. Damaged wires can start fires.
- Open flames from smoking materials or candles in a home with excess clutter are very dangerous.
- Blocked pathways and exits may hinder escape from a fire.

How Hoarding Impacts First Responders:
- Hoarding puts first responders in harm’s way.
- Firefighters cannot move swiftly through a home filled with clutter.
- Responders can be trapped in a home when exits are blocked. They can be injured by objects falling from piles.
- The weight of the stored items, especially if water is added to put out a fire, can lead to building collapse.
- Fighting fires is very risky in a hoarding home. It is hard to enter the home to provide medical care. The clutter impedes the search and rescue of people and pets.

Dangers of Sky Lanterns

While popular for weddings and special events, sky lanterns are illegal by the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code. They are pretty but they not only violate the code but bring with them the risk of fire and tremendous liability.
- Lanterns are made of oiled rice paper with bamboo frames or other materials that can easily catch on fire.
- A candle or wax fuel cell is used with the device.
- The lit flame heats the inside of the lantern, causing it to rise into the air.
- Once lit and airborne, it can travel over a mile in distance.
- Wind will affect the lantern and can send a flaming lantern back to the ground.
- A flaming lantern can drop onto a rooftop, field, trees or power lines before the flame is fully extinguished.
- A destructive fire can result when a flaming lantern reaches the ground during dry conditions.
- Sky lanterns should not be used under any circumstances.

Visit our website at www.RFDGOV.com for more safety tips.
Windows are Vital to Survival, but Keep Safety in Mind

There’s no way to hear the story about rock guitarist Eric Clapton’s 4-year old son, Conor, without being overcome with shock and sadness. Conor fell 49 stories to his death in New York City in March 1991 after a maintenance worker opened a 6-by-4-foot window in the apartment where Conor was staying with his mother. According to the New York Times, Conor, unaware the window was open, ran across the room and fell through the opening. The window did not have a proactive apparatus around it.

The National Safety Council, along with window and door industry professionals formed the Window Safety Task Force to educate caregivers about window safety. They offer these suggestions to help protect children:

- Remember, there is no substitute for adult supervision when it comes to window safety.
- Keep windows closed and locked when children are present.
- When opening windows for ventilation, make sure children can’t reach them.
- For a double-hung window on an upper floor of the home, open the top sash nearest the ceiling for ventilation while keeping the bottom sash closed.
- Don’t rely on insect screens to prevent a fall; they are not designed to withstand the weight of a person.
- Keep furniture away from windows as they could tempt a curious child to climb and potentially fall.
- If there are young children in the home, install ASTM-approved limited opening hardware, which only allows a window to open a few inches yet can be quickly open for escape in case of a fire.

National Window Safety Week April 3-9, 2016

This week coincides with the arrival of spring, when homeowners naturally want to open their windows and let in the fresh air. The National Safety Council and the Richmond Fire Department encourage homeowners and caregivers to think about ways to help keep families safer, whether it’s protecting children from falls or having the family practicing an escape route. According to most residential building codes, bedrooms and other sleeping areas must have a secondary means of escape in case of fire or smoke, and that exit is often a window. Just having windows designated for escape is not enough; they also must be safe and accessible.

> Test windows to make sure they open easily and are not sealed shut by paint, dirt or weathering.
> If windows can’t be opened quickly replace them.
> Keep escape routes free from clutter to speed your escape and to help prevent potential falls; you could be exiting in the dark or through smoke.
> Practice fire escape routes with everyone in the home.
> Conduct daytime and nighttime drills and assign someone to assist sound sleepers, young children or those with limited mobility.
> Keep emergency escape ladders in second or third story bedrooms and teach everyone how to use them.
> Examine window hardware and make sure windows lock to help seal out air, moisture and intruders.

Important Notice! Unattended cooking is the leading cause of residential fires in our city. Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, boiling or broiling food. Use a timer to remind you that you are cooking. Keep anything that can catch fire, like oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels or curtains, away from your stovetop. If you have a kitchen fire, just get everyone out, close the door behind you and dial 911 from your meeting place.

Do you have a working smoke alarm? The Richmond Metro Fire Departments offer free smoke alarms, batteries and installation. Call the Metro Richmond Fire Safety Hotline toll-free at 1-888-537-5967 to schedule a visit from your firefighters. If you would like, we can even conduct a free home safety survey while we are there. Call today!