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Home Structure Fires that Began with Upholstered Furniture

In 2005-2009, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 7,040 home structure fires per year in which upholstered furniture was the first item ignited. These fires caused an annual average of 500 civilian fire deaths, 890 civilian fire injuries, and $442 million in direct property damage.

On average, one of every 14 reported upholstered furniture fires resulted in death.

Overall, fires beginning with upholstered furniture accounted for 2% of reported home fires but one of every five (19%) home fire deaths.

Major Causes of Upholstered Furniture Fires

Smoking materials remain the leading cause of upholstered furniture fires and losses. One of every six such fires started by smoking materials resulted in death.

Portable and fixed space heaters were involved in 8% of the upholstered furniture fires and 7% of the associated deaths.

Operating equipment was the heat source in 22% of the fires and 15% of the deaths.

Together, candles, matches and lighters were involved in 21% of the fires and 12% of the deaths.

Electrical failures or malfunctions were factors in 14% of the home upholstered furniture fires and 10% of the deaths. These failures were in all types of electrical appliances, not just electrical distribution or lighting equipment.

Upholstered furniture fires started by smoking materials and associated deaths fell sharply since 1980. The declines in upholstered furniture fires started by candles, matches or lighters and by operating equipment were not as sharp. No clear trend was seen for upholstered furniture deaths from candles, matches and lighters or operating equipment.

Home Upholstered Furniture Fires Started by: Smoking Materials; Candles, Lighters and Matches; or Operating Equipment; by Year 1980-2009

Civilian Deaths from Home Upholstered Furniture Fires Started by: Smoking Materials; Candles, Lighters and Matches; or Operating Equipment; by Year 1980-209

Source: *Home Upholstered Furniture Fires*, Marty Ahrens, NFPA Fire Analysis and Research, Quincy, MA. August 2011