

U.S. SMOKING-MATERIAL FIRE PROBLEM

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Abstract

In 2006, there were an estimated 142,900 smoking-material fires in the U.S., up from 135,100 in 2005. These fires resulted in an estimated 780 civilian deaths, 1,600 civilian injuries and \$606 million in direct property damage. Upholstered furniture and mattresses and bedding are the first items ignited for most home structure fatal fires started by smoking materials. One out of four fatal victims of smoking-materials is not the smoker whose cigarette started the fire. Fewer fatal smoking-material fires started in living rooms, family rooms, and dens than in bedrooms. In recent years, Canada and three out of four U.S. states, with four-fifths of the U.S. population, have passed legislation requiring that all cigarettes sold be “fire safe,” that is, have sharply reduced ignition strength (ability to start fires), as determined by ASTM Standard E2187-04.

Keywords: Smoking, cigarette, fire statistics, fire safe cigarette

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Executive Summary

In 2006, there were an estimated 142,900 smoking-material fires in the U.S., up from 135,100 in 2005. These fires resulted in an estimated 780 civilian deaths, 1,600 civilian injuries and \$606 million in direct property damage, all up from the year before. The long-term trend in smoking-material fires has been down, by 57% from 1980 to 2006, helped by the decline in smoking and by the effect of standards and regulations that have made mattresses and upholstered furniture more resistant to cigarette ignition. (In this analysis, “smoking materials” refer only to lighted tobacco products, not matches or lighters.)

Mattresses and bedding, upholstered furniture, and trash are the items most commonly ignited in smoking-material home fires. These items excluding trash also account for most associated fire deaths. More fatal smoking-material fires start in bedrooms than in living rooms, family rooms, and dens; this is the first study in this series to show this pattern.

One out of four fatal victims of smoking-material fires is not the smoker whose cigarette started the fire.

The risk of dying in a home structure fire caused by smoking materials rises with age. One-third (36%) of fatal home smoking-material-fire victims were age 65 or older, compared to their 12% share of the population. Older adults (age 65 and over) are less likely to smoke than younger adults. Therefore, their high rates of smoking-material fire deaths per million people are even more noteworthy.

A USFA/NFPA study recommended seven educational messages to support the behavioral side of a comprehensive strategy to reduce smoking fires:

- If you smoke, smoke outside.
- Whenever you smoke, use deep, wide, sturdy ashtrays. Ashtrays should be set on something sturdy and hard to ignite, like an end table.
- Before you throw out butts and ashes, make sure they are out. Dowsing in water or sand is the best way to do that.
- Check under furniture cushions and in other places people smoke for cigarette butts that may have fallen out of sight.
- Smoking should not be allowed in a home where oxygen is used.
- To prevent a deadly cigarette fire, you have to be alert. You won't be if you are sleepy, have been drinking, or have taken medicine or other drugs.
- If you smoke, choose fire-safe cigarettes. They are less likely to cause fires.

Since 2003, Canada and three out of four U.S. states, with four-fifths of the U.S. population, have passed laws or other requirements that all cigarettes sold must be “fire safe,” that is, have sharply reduced ignition strength (ability to start fires), as determined by ASTM Standard E2187-04.

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Smoking-Material Fire Problem

U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated 142,900 smoking-material fires in 2006. These fires caused:



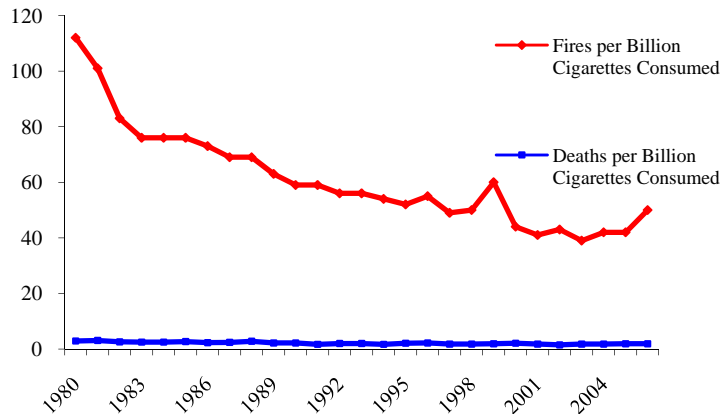
- 780 civilian deaths
- 1,600 civilian injuries, and
- \$606 million in direct property damage.

These estimates are derived from the U.S. Fire Administration National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) Version 5.0 and NFPA's annual fire department experience survey.

Trends in the Smoking-Material Fire Problem Fire Loss Rates, 1980-2006

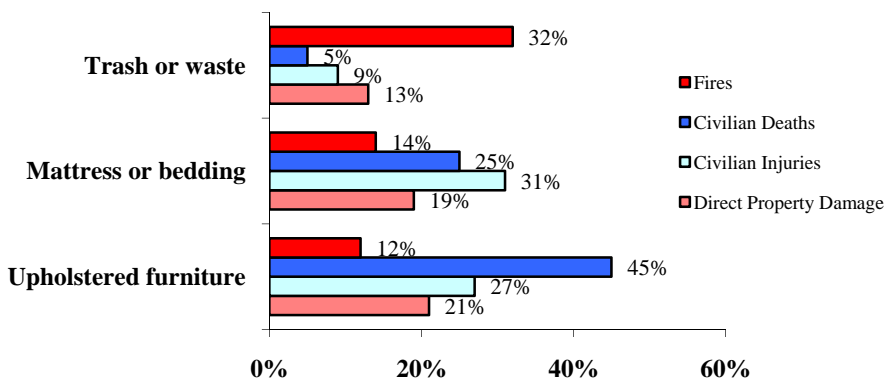


FACT: One out of four fatal victims of smoking-materials is not the smoker whose cigarette started the fire.



In recent years, Canada and three out of four states, with four-fifths of the U.S. population, have required that all cigarettes sold must be “fire safe,” that is, have sharply reduced ignition strength or ability to start fires. When these laws are fully implemented, it is expected they will have an impact on future smoking material fire data. See www.firesafecigarettes.org for more details.

Smoking-Material Fires in Homes by Leading Item First Ignited in 2003-2006 (Including Fires Reported as Confined)



FACT: More fatal smoking-material fires start in bedrooms then in living rooms, family rooms and dens.



FACT: The risk of dying in a home structure fire caused by smoking materials rises with age.