

SAFETY ALERT: KITCHEN FIRES IN CAMPUS HOUSING



OCTOBER 2020

The purpose of this Alert is to provide safety information to help prevent fires when cooking, and precautions to take if a fire occurs.

Please share this Alert with others who may benefit from this information.

WHAT HAPPENED?

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, **three kitchen fires** occurred in nine days that were started while **cooking with oil and/or grease** in University residence units.

In two of the three incidents, water was used in an attempt to extinguish the fire, which resulted in fueling the fire and activating the fire alarm and sprinkler system.

The Seattle Fire Department responded and fortunately only minor injuries were sustained by the residents.



Stove Top Cooking Fire Damage

The following **causal factors** were identified for these three incidents:

- Unattended cooking
- Cooking with oil and grease
- Incorrect attempt to extinguish the fire

FOLLOW SAFE COOKING PRACTICES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF FIRE AND INJURY:

- **Never leave oil/grease cooking unattended.**
- **Gradually raise the temperature** of cooking oil/grease to the preferred cooking temperature rather than starting at the highest setting.
- If the oil/grease starts smoking or catches fire, **smother the fire** by placing a lid on the pan and **turn off the heat source.**
- For an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed.
- Only use **baking soda** or a dry **chemical fire extinguisher** on an oil/grease fire.
- **Never pour water** on an oil or grease fire.
- **Call 9-1-1** if a fire is too large to safely put out.

COOKING FIRE STATS

Why is this of concern at the UW? Because there are more than 3,000 cooking fires each year at universities nationwide and 85% of university housing fires are cooking fires. **Unattended cooking is the leading contributing factor in college cooking fires.**

Of the fires that occurred in University campus housing since January 2016, **13 of 18 fires were directly attributed to cooking.**

Cooking fires that ignite with oil or grease result in **serious injuries and fatalities** at a higher rate than other food or cooking fires.

Half of all home fires in the U.S. are caused by cooking, which led to **550 deaths and 4,820 injuries** from 2014 to 2018.

The vast majority of reported cooking fires were small. The percentage of apartment fires started by cooking was nearly twice that of cooking fires in one- or two-family homes.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO STAY SAFE?

Some types of cooking, such as frying, broiling, and boiling, need continuous attention. When simmering, baking, or roasting, cooks should stay in or near the kitchen and check on the cooking regularly. If you need to leave the kitchen, use a timer to remind yourself to return and check on the cooking.

Follow the **safe cooking practices** in this Alert to reduce the risk of fire and injury.

All fires, explosions, and hazardous material spills at any University location **must be reported immediately by calling 9-1-1 and/or activating the fire alarm system.** These incidents must also be reported to EH&S.

HOW DO WE HELP KEEP YOU SAFE?

EH&S investigates these incidents in coordination with the local fire department to determine their cause, provide consultation for preventing fires in the future, and to document the incident for reporting purposes. All fires are reportable by law.

The University adheres to the **Campus Fire Safety Right-to-Know Act** by documenting and sharing fire incident reports with the campus community for fire safety education and to prevent future incidents.

- Read the [UW Annual Security and Fire Safety Report](#) for more information about safety and security incidents at all UW campuses.
- EH&S maintains a [Campus Fire Log](#) that lists fire incidents that occur in all University campus housing locations.

Additional information about home cooking fires can be found in the National Fire Protection Association July 2020 publication on [Home Cooking Fires](#).

RESOURCES

- [National Fire Protection Association website](#)
- [UW EH&S website: Fire Safety and Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration website: Campus fire safety outreach materials](#)
- [Seattle Fire Department cooking safety video](#)
Available in 12 languages and American Sign Language. Click on the image below or visit <https://fireline.seattle.gov/2021/01/15/new-multi-lingual-and-asl-cooking-fire-safety-video/>



Kitchen fire damage. Source: Seattle Fire Department

Please contact EH&S at 206.685.0341 or uwfire@uw.edu for more information about fire safety and prevention.