

# Fire Safe Cooking

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We cook to feed ourselves almost every day; but, just because cooking is a common activity doesn't mean that it is always a safe activity. Cooking can do more than just burn your food, it can burn down your home. Like any home fire, cooking fires spread quickly, leaving you just minutes to escape safely.

## The Facts

- Cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries, and the second cause of home fire deaths in Alberta.
- Most cooking fires happen in the kitchen.
- Most kitchen fires occur between the hours of 5 and 6 pm, the evening meal preparation time.
- Cooking fires often occur when people leave their cooking unattended. Other activities in the home or outside can take the attention away from a pot or pan heating on the stove. Some common examples of unattended cooking include being distracted or pre-occupied by talking on the phone, forgetting that the stove is turned on, watching television, reading a book or answering the door; falling asleep; being under the influence of alcohol; or being drowsy from medication or fatigue.
- The majority of cooking fires start with the ignition of cooking oils (vegetable oils and animal fats).
- Most home cooking fires and injuries occur when cooking oil becomes overheated while frying foods in pots or pans on electric stoves. However, cooking fires can also happen in the oven, barbeque, or microwave.

## The Hazards

- Cooking equipment can ignite common household items, such as paper and plastic bags or curtains and wall coverings, and grease or fat residues.
- When cooking oils or fats are heated beyond 200 degrees Celsius, flammable vapours are formed which are easily ignited by flames from a gas stove burner or contact with a heated surface such as a hot electric stove element. If the oil gets hot enough, the released vapours can self-ignite.
- Re-used oil, which may have food residues, can catch fire at an even lower temperature than fresh oil.
- If water is added to a flaming pot of oil with a temperature above 200°C, it turns the water into superheated steam to cause an explosive ball of fire, spreading tiny droplets of flaming oil to engulf the kitchen area.

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## Safety Tips

### Stand By Your Pan

- Do not leave cooking unattended. Check on your cooking regularly, and use a timer to remind you that the stove or oven is on.
- If you must leave the kitchen when you're cooking, even for a short period of time, turn off the stove and remove the pot from the burner.

### No Kids or Pets Allowed

- Keep children and pets away from cooking areas, for example, by enforcing a "kid-free zone" of 1 metre around the stove.
- Use the stove's backburners whenever possible, and turn pot handles inward to reduce the risk that pots and hot contents will be knocked over.

### Oil's Well

- To prevent overheating and ignition of cooking oil, fry foods in a temperature controlled deep-fat fryer or skillet designed for a maximum temperature of 200 degrees Celsius.

### Be Organized

- Keep potholders, oven mitts, utensils, food packaging, paper and plastic bags, towels and other flammable objects away from the stovetop.
- Clean food and grease from stovetops.
- Avoid wearing loose fitting clothing or dangling sleeves while cooking.
- Do not plug multiple items into the same wall socket. This may cause the circuit to overload and short circuit, causing a fire.

### Microwave with Care

- Never use an extension cord for a microwave, plug it directly into a wall socket.
- Use only microwave-safe containers to heat food.
- Allow food to cool for a minute or more before you remove it from the microwave.
- Open microwaved containers slowly as hot steam escaping from the containers can cause painful burns.
- Never use aluminium foil or metal objects in a microwave oven.

### Kitchen Fires 101

- Always keep an oven mitt and a lid nearby when cooking. If a small grease fire starts in a pan, smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan (while wearing the oven mitt) and turn off the burner. To keep the fire from restarting, don't remove the lid until the pan is completely cool.
- Do not throw water on an oil or grease fire. If water is added to a flaming pot of oil it can spread droplets of flaming oil across the kitchen area. Also, do not try to move a pan of burning oil, as the oil may splash over the edge and start new fires or inflict serious burns.
- In case of an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you or your clothing.

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- If you have a fire in your microwave, turn it off immediately, unplug it if you can safely reach the outlet and keep the door closed until the fire is completely out.
- Keep a multipurpose 10A BC fire extinguisher in the kitchen in case of an emergency. This type of extinguisher can put out a fire caused from the ignition of paper, wood, and cardboard; cooking oil; and electricity. Make sure that you know how to use a fire extinguisher before an emergency occurs.

## Ingredients for fire safe cooking

- 2 Watchful eyes
- 1 or 2 Pot Holders or Oven Mitts
- Clean Workspace Free of Combustible Materials
- 2 Short or Close-Fitting Sleeves
- 1 Pan Lid
- 1 Fire Extinguisher