



Marion County Board of County Commissioners

Marion County Fire Rescue

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AVOID COOKOUT CALAMITIES

Immediate Release

MARION COUNTY, Fla. (May 22, 2009) – With the Memorial Day holiday quickly approaching and a glimmer of sunshine peeking in from behind the clouds, you might be thinking of having a cookout this weekend.

Why not? A cookout is a great way to relax, catch up with friends and family and enjoy good food. And what better time than a three-day weekend? With all the fun, however, it's easy to overlook the safety precautions of outdoor cooking. Let's face it; watching your deck go up in flames is not exactly your idea of the perfect ending to a summer gathering. But, this happens more often than you may think.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, between 2003 and 2006, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 7,900 home fires involving grills, hibachis or barbecues **per year**. These fires caused an annual average of 10 deaths, 120 reported injuries and \$80 million in direct property damage.

Marion County Fire Rescue urges you to follow these grilling guidelines to help keep you and your family safe while cooking-out this summer season:

General Safety Tips

- Store and use grills on non-flammable surfaces like concrete or asphalt.
- Keep the grill at least 10 feet away from your house, garage and trees/brush while in use.
- Keep children and pets away from the grilling area by establishing a three foot safe zone.
- Periodically remove grease or fat buildup in the trays below the grill so it cannot be ignited by the heat.
- Have a fire extinguisher, a garden hose attached to a water supply or at least 16 quarts of water nearby in case of a fire.
- Never leave a grill unattended.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when using the grill.

Charcoal Grilling Guidelines

- Purchase the proper starter fluid and store the can out of reach of children and away from heat sources.
- Never use any flammable liquids other than barbecue starter fluid to start a charcoal barbecue. Use starter fluid sparingly.
- Always soak coals with water after cooking; they retain their heat for long periods of time.
- Keep damp or wet coals in a well ventilated area. During the drying process, spontaneous combustion can occur in confined areas.

Propane Grilling Safety Guidelines

- If you have a propane grill, check the propane cylinder hose for leaks before using it for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will quickly reveal escaping propane by releasing bubbles. If your grill has a gas leak turn off the propane tank and grill. Get the grill serviced by a professional before using it again.
- Never start a propane grill with the lid closed. This could cause gas accumulation leading to an explosion.
- If you smell gas while cooking, turn off the propane tank and grill immediately, and get away from the area.

Electric Grilling Guidelines

- Keep the grill at least 10 feet away from any combustible material.
- Do not use any flammable liquids to start an electric grill.
- When using an electrical extension cord, make sure it is properly rated for the electric grill. Otherwise you could risk an electrical fire.

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