A Harsh Reality

We all read and watch news reports about tragic events that lead to a family’s suffering, often thinking, “Those things happen to other people; that wouldn’t happen to us.” In early January, we all learned that those things can happen to us when a house fire destroyed a neighborhood home, severely injured a father, and killed a grandmother and young daughter.

Since that night, there has been much discussion regarding the number of tankers necessary to get the fire under control and the lack of water within the neighborhood to aid in fighting the fire. While there is public water available a short distance away across the Orange County line, there is no public water available here in Fox Chase.

Members of the Fox Chase Home Owners Association (FCHOA) Board of Directors met with Timothy McLaughlin, our representative on the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors, to express our concerns over the water situation. Since the county has no plans to extend public water this far out, discussion turned to the possibility of installing a dry hydrant, which would enable the fire department to use water from the lake. A few days later, ranking representatives from the Department of Forestry, local utilities, and the fire department met with board members on site and inspected the lake. Unfortunately, that inspection ascertained that a dry hydrant is not feasible, logistically or financially. The only area appropriate for it is near the dam. The only access is via one of the surrounding lots and would require construction of a road that fire trucks could travel to access the dry hydrant, as well as an easement to do so.

The combined realities that “it” can happen to us and the lack of public water within the neighborhood, stress the importance of safe practices and having a plan in place should the unimaginable happen. To that end, this special issue newsletter is devoted to fire safety in the home. It offers basic information to help prepare your family should a fire happen as well as preventive measures to decrease the possibility.

Please check out the online resources listed on the back page for more detailed information. Many of those sites offer free educational publications and safety tips that you can download and print, including publications specifically directed toward children.

The Hill family, who rented the home on Fox Gate Drive, lost two loved ones and everything they owned. They have since moved into another house just a few miles away. Many businesses and individuals, including the FCHOA and neighbors, have donated money, gift cards, clothing, linens, furniture, housewares, and other items to help defray expenses and setup a new home.

If you would like to help, there are neighbors who see and talk to the Hills regularly and are happy to deliver donations to them. Please contact info@fox-chase.org for more information.

The homeowners, who currently live overseas, are working on plans to rebuild the house. In the meantime, since all of us drive past the property as we enter and exit the neighborhood, please help keep an eye on it. If you notice anything suspicious, notify the Sherriff’s Department (non-emergency, 540-582-7115; emergency, 911.).

Keep in mind that the lot and house are private property; and demolition and construction sites are inherently dangerous. Parents, please instruct your children to stay away.

Most of Spotsylvania County’s firefighters and rescue personnel are volunteers; all of whom have the same qualifications, training, applicable certifications, and dedication as their professional counterparts. Please consider including the volunteer fire department among your charitable giving. You can visit their website at: http://www.spotsyfire.org.
Be Prepared — Make a Plan & Practice It

A fire escape plan is one plan you hope never to implement. Yet, it is one of the most important plans you can have. Every second counts in a fire and having an escape plan, and practicing it, can keep your family safe. For more detailed information, see The National Fire Protection Association’s (NFPA’s) escape planning webpage. It has good family- and child-friendly resources: [http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/escape-planning](http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/escape-planning).

🔹 Your plan should include:

🔹 Two ways to get out of every room.
🔹 A designated place outside for everyone to meet.
🔹 A designated primary and backup person to ensure infants and small children get out.
🔹 Accommodations for those with special needs, if applicable.

🔹 If you have young children, draw a map of your home depicting your escape plan.

🔹 Ensure everyone staying in your house, whether permanently or temporarily, know the escape plan.

🔹 Keep all exits (interior and exterior doors, and windows) clear of furniture, electronics, boxes, toys, and any other obstructions at all times.

🔹 Ensure that windows open easily, screens can be quickly removed, and security devices have quick releases.

🔹 For upper level rooms, invest in collapsible ladders.

🔹 Practice opening windows and removing screens and security devices, using collapsible ladders, and moving about your house in complete darkness or with your eyes closed.

🔹 At least twice a year, practice your escape plan from start to finish with all members of the household participating. Hold your practices at different times of day and time yourselves — strive to get out within 2 minutes.

Basic Facts About House Fires

Fire is fast, hot, dark, and deadly. It spreads quickly; a small flame can turn into a major fire in less than 30 seconds. In 2 minutes, a fire can become life threatening; in 5, it can engulf an entire home. Temperatures quickly reach as high as 600 degrees. There is no time to collect valuables or even call 911; there is only time to get out. The heat and smoke, which damage lungs and hinder the ability to breathe, can be more dangerous than flames. Fire consumes oxygen and produces poisonous gases that lead to disorientation and drowsiness. Ironically, the thick, black smoke produced can leave a burning home in complete darkness. House fires kill more than 2,500 people every year and injure more than 12,600.

Smoke Detectors Really Do Save Lives

If you do nothing else, ensure working smoke detectors are properly installed on every level of your home, in every bedroom, and outside every sleeping area. Sixty percent of deaths from house fires occur in homes that do not have working smoke detectors.

For the best protection, use both ionization-sensor smoke detectors and photoelectric-sensor smoke detectors, or dual-sensor smoke detectors (which have both types of sensors). Ionization sensors are more responsive to flaming fires; photoelectric sensors are more responsive to smoldering fires.

Test batteries every month and replace them twice per year — every spring when you set your clocks forward and every fall when you set your clocks back is a good way to remember to replace them. Replace batteries even if your smoke detectors are hard wired. Replace smoke detectors every 8 to 10 years.


If feasible, install a monitored alarm system or add smoke detectors to your existing alarm system. In addition to sounding an alarm inside the house, the alarm system will send a signal to the alarm company who will alert the fire department to an emergency.
Getting to Safety

When the smoke detector sounds, or you see fire or smoke, get out, stay out, and then call 911.

Remember — your escape plan identifies two ways out of every room. If smoke or fire blocks your first way out, use your second. But, before opening any door, feel it and the doorknob. If the door and/or doorknob feels hot — or smoke is leaking in from around the door — do not open it. Use your other way out. If you determine the door is safe to open, do so slowly and be ready to close it quickly in case heavy smoke or fire is present outside the door.

If both ways of escape are blocked, close the door and cover cracks around it and any vents in the room with tape or cloth (e.g., towels, sheets, clothes, etc.) to help keep smoke out. Call 911 and tell the emergency operator you are trapped in a burning house; give the address and describe where you are in the house. Open a window from the top and bottom, and use a bright— or light-colored cloth or flashlight to signal your whereabouts.

If you must escape through a smoke-filled room or hallway, “get low and go.” Remember smoke from a house fire is toxic and obscures vision; but, smoke rises. Keeping low to the floor will put you below most of the smoke. Heat also rises, so the heat of the fire is less intense at floor level.

If your clothing catches fire, “stop, drop, and roll;” stop immediately, drop to the ground, cover your face with your hands, and roll over and over or back and forth until the fire is out. If stop, drop, and roll is not an option, smother the fire with a blanket or towel. Do not fan the fire.

If someone in the home requires assistance leaving and you can’t reach him or her, get out and call 911. Tell the emergency operator where the person is or likely to be inside the house.

Ensure every household member understands the importance of getting out of the house and to your designated meeting place as quickly as possible. That way, you will know who is out and who is not and can alert firefighters as necessary.

Fire Safety Begins with Prevention

Some simple habits can help decrease the possibility of a house fire. Two general rules are: 1) establish 3-foot safety zones — keep children, combustibles, and flammables at least 3 feet away from anything that can get hot, e.g., stoves, grills, clothes dryers, space heaters, generators, fireplaces, wood stoves, candles, etc.; and 2) never leave an open flame unattended, e.g., candles, gas stoves, etc.. Specific guidance for creating a safer home are offered below and on the next page.

**Cooking**

- When frying, grilling, or broiling, stay in the kitchen; if you leave for even a short time, turn off the stove. When simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling, check regularly and use a timer to remind you that food is cooking. Never use a stove to heat your home.

- Do not cook if you are sleepy or impaired by alcohol, illness, or medication.

- Place barbecue grills at least 10 feet from siding and deck railing; do not place grills under eaves or overhanging branches.

**Smoking**

- Cigarette butts catch fire easily and burn fast. Completely extinguish cigarettes in an ashtray; never just toss them away. A cigarette landing in mulch, grass, brush, etc. can easily start a fire that spreads quickly, threatening nearby houses, especially during dry and/or windy weather. Never toss hot cigarettes butts or ashes into a trashcan.

- Never set ashtrays on a sofa, chair, ottoman, etc.; . Make a habit of checking under furniture and cushions for cigarette butts.

- Err on the side of caution and never ever smoke in bed.

- To decrease the risk of fire, only smoke outside and use a container filled with sand as an ashtray.
Prevention (continued)

Electrical Outlets, Wires, Cords, and Switches

❖ Never force fit a plug into an outlet, or overload an outlet or extension cord.
❖ Replace frayed, worn, old, or damaged wires and cords. Never run wires and cords under rugs or furniture.
❖ If a light switch is hot to the touch or a light flickers, immediately turn it off and contact a certified electrician.

Clothes Dryer

❖ Have only professionals install and service dryers, and keep them in proper working order. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for operating and maintaining your dryer.
❖ Dryers must be properly grounded, using the right plug and outlet. Use rigid or flexible metal venting material to sustain proper air flow.
❖ Always use a lint filter and always clean it after every load of laundry.
❖ Make sure the air exhaust vent pipe is unrestricted and the outdoor vent flap opens when the dryer is in use. (During severe winter weather, ensure the vent flap is not blocked by snow or ice.) Clean lint out of the vent pipe at least once a year, or more often when clothes take longer to dry than usual.
❖ Do not leave the house or go to bed with the clothes dryer running.

Space Heaters, Fireplaces, and Wood Stoves

❖ Buy only portable space heaters that have thermostat controls and automatically turn off if they fall over. Turn off heaters when you leave the room or go to sleep.
❖ If using kerosene heaters, use only crystal clear, K-1 kerosene. Never overfill it and use only in a well-ventilated room.
❖ Inspect and clean woodstove pipes and chimneys annually, and check monthly for damage or obstructions.
❖ Never burn trash, paper, or green wood in a fireplace or woodstove.
❖ Use a fireplace screen heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire fireplace opening. Use only fire-resistant hearth rugs
❖ Ensure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed.
❖ Store ashes in a tightly sealed metal container outside the house.

Safe Purchases

When purchasing smoke detectors, collapsible ladders, portable generators, space heaters, appliances, electronics, lamps and light fixtures, extension cords, etc., look for the seal that ensures they have been evaluated for safety by a credible laboratory, such as the Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

A Word About Portable Generators

Follow manufacturer’s instructions carefully and never use them inside the house.

Online Resources

American Red Cross
http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/home-fire

Ready.gov
http://www.ready.gov/home-fires

National Fire Protection Association
http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers

Safe Kids Worldwide
http://www.safekids.org/tip/fire-safety-tips