

media release



Check on seniors amid fire concerns

Tuesday, 28 July 2020

South Australia's fire services are reminding the community to check on seniors and neighbours who live alone after several fatalities in recent months.

Since May, SA Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) and SA Country Fire Service (CFS) firefighters responded to four house fires, with each involving a sole male occupant being found deceased inside.

The men were aged between 68 and 89, and all were living alone when the fires occurred. The causes of the fatalities are being investigated by the Coroner's office.

The MFS and CFS are sharing ways to reduce fire risk in the homes of seniors, particularly if they are living alone.

Australians aged 65 and above are overrepresented in fire deaths (36.4%) and men were 1.7 times more likely than women to die in a fire, a national Preventable Residential Fire Fatalities report has found¹.

The report also showed that people who live alone are particularly at risk of a fatal fire (44.5%), with three quarters of the fire deaths happening between 8pm and 8am. The statistics highlight the importance of installing working smoke alarms in homes. There have been 5 fire fatalities in South Australia in 2019-20.

MFS Community Engagement Manager Vinny Schar said winter is a busy period for firefighters responding to residential fires.

"There are plenty of seniors who live alone and value their independence, so it is important to remind them of the risks of a fire starting in their homes and ways they can reduce that risk," MFS Community Engagement Manager Schar said.

"This is also a timely reminder to South Australians; that if you have an older family member or neighbour living alone or if you're caring for a senior, be sure to check on their wellbeing and make sure they are fire safe."

"If you are older and living alone, consider installing additional smoke alarms in bedrooms and living areas, and consider having them all interconnected. MFS and CFS firefighters attended fires where smoke alarms gave early warning and alerted occupants to escape, the evidence shows that working smoke alarms save lives."

During winter, MFS and CFS crews have attended a number of heating-related blazes.

¹ Coates, L., Kaandorp, G., Harris, J., van Leeuwen, J., Avci, A., Evans, J., George, S., Gissing, A., van den Honert, R. and Haynes, K., 2019, Preventable residential fire fatalities: July 2003 to June 2017, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

For media enquiries and interviews call the MFS Media Line on (08) 8204 3770

Further information for the public:

Call the MFS Community Engagement Department on (08) 8204 3611 during business hours.

Country callers 1300 737 637.

www.mfs.sa.gov.au

media release



Year	Number of heater-related fires in SA
2018	62
2019	41
2020 (until 14/7/2020)	26

MFS Community Engagement Manager Schar said South Australians should be careful when using heaters indoors and keep a clearance of at least two metres away from any combustibles.

CFS Strategy and Compliance Phil McDonough said the importance of smoke alarms should not be underestimated.

“Smoke alarms give early warning, especially when occupants are asleep, and provide valuable time to escape in the event of a fire,” CFS Manager Risk and Response Planning McDonough said.

“If you live alone or know someone who lives alone, it is important to clear pathways throughout the home. Planning escape routes ahead of time could potentially save lives during a fire.”

Emergency Services Minister Corey Wingard said the recent deaths were avoidable and tragic.

“It’s clear that older South Australians are vulnerable and at risk and we, as a community, should do what we can to help protect their safety,” the Minister said.

If you live alone, or know a senior who is living alone, share these fire safety tips:

- Prepare your [Home Fire Escape Plan](#) by establishing main and secondary escape routes from each room in your house. Practice your Home Fire Escape Plan regularly. It is important that people with reduced mobility know to evacuate at the first sign of fire, rather than trying to extinguish it.
- Clear passageways and escape routes of any obstacles.
- Install deadlocks that can be opened from inside the home without a key or leave keys in the deadlocks when there is anyone at home.
- Store aids such as glasses, walking frames, wheelchairs etc. in easy reach of your bed, and ensure you can get through all doorways quickly and easily in the event of an emergency.
- If you have a personal alarm, wear it in bed or keep it close to the bed while you sleep.
- Smoke is the biggest killer in fires – get down low and crawl under smoke. For those who cannot self-mobilise without assistance, call triple zero and stay on the line with the operator so you can tell them where to find you. Get down low in the room.
- Consider installing a ramp, handrails or tactile ground surface indicators to help you evacuate.
- Combine these safety tips with working smoke alarms that are less than 10 years old. Test smoke alarms monthly, clean them once every six months and change the batteries annually.
- Consider installing interconnected smoke alarms and additional smoke alarms in all sleeping and living areas.

For media enquiries and interviews call the MFS Media Line on (08) 8204 3770

Further information for the public:

Call the MFS Community Engagement Department on (08) 8204 3611 during business hours.

Country callers 1300 737 637.

www.mfs.sa.gov.au