

media release

SA Metropolitan Fire Service



Cigarette fires risk lives and property

Thursday, 6 January 2011

A series of fires caused by discarded cigarettes has risked lives and caused more than half a million dollars in property damage, prompting a warning from the Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS).

Since 21 December, 2010, MFS and Country Fire Service (CFS) crews have responded to four house fires caused by cigarettes. The collective damage bill is \$660,000.

MFS Fire Cause Investigator, Phil Kilsby said the latest fire occurred just before 8 pm last night at a home at Klemzig in Adelaide.

“A carelessly discarded cigarette can cost you your home – and possibly your life. People should always make sure that they fully extinguish a cigarette and dispose of it carefully.

“It’s also not advisable to smoke around combustible materials. Two of the fires crews have responded to in recent weeks involved cigarettes igniting furniture. The danger with cigarette fires is that they can smoulder for several hours unnoticed and catch people by surprise – sometimes while they sleep,” he said.

In 2010, the sale of self extinguishing cigarettes became compulsory in Australia. The MFS welcomes their introduction as a positive initiative but warns people should not become complacent about extinguishing cigarettes.

“It’s believed self extinguishing cigarettes will improve fire safety, however they are not designed to be foolproof. Any cigarette has the potential to cause a fire that claims property or lives if it’s not disposed of responsibly,” Station Officer Kilsby said.

In the last five years, about eight per cent of all significant fires* have been attributed to cigarettes in South Australia. In the last four years, there have been **five fatalities** in SA attributed to cigarette fires.

If you are a smoker or have smokers in the home, the MFS recommends the following home fire safety tips:

- Use deep, sturdy ashtrays.
- Empty ashtrays frequently into an outside refuse bin ensuring first that all cigarette remnants and matches are extinguished.
- **NEVER** smoke in bed.
- **NEVER** leave lit cigarettes unattended.
- Keep matches and lighters well out of reach of children. Storage above adult shoulder height and out of sight is recommended.

The MFS urges householders to combine the above safety tips with reliable, working smoke alarms that are less than 10 years old and a Home Fire Escape Plan.

* A significant fire is defined as one that causes damage in excess of \$30,000.

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

Further information for the public:

Call the MFS Community Education Department on (08) 8204 3611 during business hours.
Country callers 1300 737 637.

www.mfs.sa.gov.au