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Use caution with turkey fryers and cooking over the holidays

As families prepare Thanksgiving meals, it's imperative that they keep safety in mind since cooking fires are more likely to occur on Thanksgiving than on any other day of the year. On Thanksgiving Day, the incidence of home cooking fires is roughly three times the daily average.

Studies by the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) show cooking fires are the primary cause of home fires and home fire injuries. Hundreds of Americans are killed each year due to home cooking fires and thousands more are injured. Cooking fires also cause roughly half a billion dollars in direct property damage to the homes and the belongings inside.

It can be easy to get wrapped up in entertaining guests, but it is important to remember to stay in the kitchen and monitor meal preparation closely as most cooking fires start because cooking has been left unattended.

People may look to vary the traditional turkey entrée by using a turkey fryer. The deep-frying cooking process requires that up to five gallons of oil be heated before placing the turkey into the device. Tests have shown that a number of available turkey fryer devices are not sturdy and can easily tip over, allowing hot oil to spill, which creates a serious risk of fire or burns. There also have been reports of turkey fryers overheating, which can also lead to hot oil spilling or splattering outside the fryer leading to dangerous fires, serious injuries, and property loss.

Sarasota County Fire Chief Kenneth Ellerbe offers these tips for safer cooking:

Stand by your pan

- Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling food.
- If you must leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.
- If you are simmering, baking, boiling or roasting food, check it regularly, remain in the home while the food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you that the stove or oven is on.
- Keep in mind that you should avoid wearing loose clothing or dangling sleeves while cooking. Loose clothing can catch fire if it comes in contact with a gas flame or electric burner.

No kids allowed

- Keep kids away from cooking areas by enforcing a kid-free zone of three feet (one meter) around the stove.
- If you have young children, use the stove's back burners whenever possible, and turn pot handles inward to reduce the risk that pots with hot contents will be knocked over.
- Never hold a small child while cooking.

Keep it clean

- Keep anything that can catch fire — pot holders, oven mitts, wooden utensils, paper or plastic bags, food packaging, towels or curtains — away from your stove top.
- Clean up food and grease from burners and the stovetop.

For more information on keeping your family safe for the holidays, call the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for the Emergency Services Public Education Office or visit the county's Web site at www.scgov.net.

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