



Hon Michael Gallacher MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for the Hunter

MEDIA RELEASE

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MINISTER LAUNCHES WINTER FIRE CAMPAIGN

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Michael Gallacher, today revealed new household fire statistics that show more than 40 per cent of all fire fatalities occur in winter.

The Minister launched the annual Winter Fire Safety campaign on the first day of winter to warn the public of the fire dangers that exist in the family home.

According to the new statistics, which are part of a current research project being undertaken by Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW), kitchens are the source of 49 per cent of household fires each year.

“Firefighters around Australia dread the first day of winter, because there is always a spike in the number of house fires as people leave cooking unattended and start using more heating than other times of the year,” Mr Gallacher said.

“So it’s probably not a surprise that there are many more kitchen fires in winter compared to summer months.

“People need to be vigilant in their homes this winter. It’s basic steps like turning heaters off and not overloading power points. The best way to keep your family out of harm’s way is by doing a fire safety audit of your home.

The statistics also showed that 27 per cent of residential fires were started in areas of the home other than the kitchen, bedroom, lounge, laundry or garage.

These figures were part of a FRNSW research project that examined more than 22,000 fire records over five years between 2006 and 2010. More results, based on demographics and what appliances are the major cause of fires, are expected in the coming months.

Mr Gallacher also presented household fire survivor and now fire safety campaigner, Linda Buchan, of Newport, with a special Commissioner’s Commendation for her brave efforts in being the face of a NSW television commercial for the winter fire safety campaign.

“Linda tragically endured the loss of her sister and also suffered many personal injuries due to a home fire, and has spent many years undergoing rehabilitation,” Mr Gallacher said.

“It’s the tragic stories of survivors like Linda that reinforce the dangers of household fires and encourages individuals to take steps to prevent them.”

FRNSW Commissioner Greg Mullins said 10 per cent of fires start in bedrooms, with the new research showing they were caused mostly by heating and electrical equipment.

“There is a large rise in the number of bedroom fires during winter, but this can be prevented with simple steps such as maintaining your appliances and turning them off before you leave the room or go to sleep,” Commissioner Mullins said.

“Sadly household fires occur too often in the colder months. In 2010 there were 25 fatalities and 558 injuries in almost 4,500 residential fires in NSW for the year.”

NSW Rural Fire Service Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers said householders should always remain mindful that fires can occur in all parts of the home. While the majority of fires originate in living areas such as the lounge, kitchen and bedrooms, almost a third of home fires start in other areas like hallways.

“A faulty fusebox, unattended candles, or an overloaded powerpoint could start a fire that destroys your property, or worse, injures your family,” Deputy Commissioner Rogers said.

Fire authorities in partnership with sponsors GIO and McDonalds are encouraging householders to complete an online Home Fire Safety Audit as part of the winter fire safety campaign at: www.homefiresafetyaudit.com.au

Media resources

The FRNSW website www.fire.nsw.gov.au contains a number of resources for the media, including videos and photos of various fire scenes, and radio grabs for media at <http://firestations.fire.nsw.gov.au/download/winter2011/>

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Winter Fire Safety Campaign Fact Sheet

From 2006 to 2010 inclusive, there were 22,800 home fires attended by Fire and Rescue NSW, with 30 per cent occurring during the three winter months.

In the past five years, comparing winter (June, July, August) to summer (December, January, February), there were:

- 23 per cent more kitchen fires in winter compared to summer
- 54 per cent more bedroom fires in winter compared to summer
- 112 per cent more lounge room fires in winter compared to summer

In the past five years, throughout the year:

- 49 per cent of fires started in kitchens
- 10 per cent of fires started in bedrooms
- 8 per cent of fires started in lounge rooms
- 3 per cent of fires started in laundries, mainly from clothes dryers
- 3 per cent of fires started in garages
- 27 per cent of fires started in other areas including hallways, stairwells, decks, outside power boxes, wall cavities, etc.