Up in Flames:
The Dangers of Smoking in Apartment Units

Cigarettes and other smoking materials are the leading cause of residential fire deaths in Minnesota and the United States. These fires can also result in millions of dollars in damaged property and healthcare costs. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, more attention needs to be given to preventing fires caused by lighted tobacco materials.[1]

The Cause of Smoking-Related Fires

- Cigarette-caused fires often result when a smoker—who may also be impaired by alcohol and may have fallen asleep—drops, abandons, or improperly disposes of a smoldering cigarette. A dropped cigarette can lie in furniture or bed linens and **smolder for up to 30-45 minutes,** causing fire ignition or large amounts of smoke.[2]

- A dropped, smoldering cigarette can cause smoke which contains **carbon monoxide and other highly toxic gases** that can render people semiconscious or unconscious, putting them at greater risk of injury or death from a fire.[2]

Apartment Buildings and Smoking-Related Fires

- Multi-family dwellings along with one-and two-family homes account for over **90% of residential smoking fires**.[1]

- Although only 19.8% of all residential fires occur in multi-family buildings, **26.4% of all residential smoking fires occur in multi-family buildings**.[1]

- There were **52 smoking-related** fires in multi-family dwellings in Minnesota in 2009.[3]

Smoking-Related Fires are Deadly

- Cigarette-caused residential fires result in **700-900 deaths** in the United States per year.[1] The fatality rate due to smoking-related fires is **nearly 4 times higher** than the overall residential fire rate; injuries are more than twice as likely.[1]

- Smoking caused 29% of all fire fatalities and 42% of residential fire deaths in Minnesota in 2009.[3] Smoking also caused **25% of multi-family fire deaths** occurring in Minnesota in 2009.[4]

- **One quarter (25%) of victims** of smoking-material fire fatalities are not the smoker whose cigarettes started the fire.[5] Children of the smoker, spouses/partners, neighbors, friends, parents, siblings, roommates, other relatives, and passersby can all be killed in these fires.[6] Firefighters can also be injured or killed while working to put out a cigarette-caused fire.

- Residential smoking fires that injure are **more prevalent at night**. Forty percent (40%) of those killed in residential smoking fires were asleep, as were 35% of those injured.[1]

The Cost of a Smoking-Related Fire

- In 2009, the average dollar loss per multi-family smoking-related fire in Minnesota was over **$7,550 per incident**.[3]

- A fire caused by careless smoking at an apartment in Burnsville, Minnesota in June 2007, resulted in **$1.5 million** in building damage and $800,000 in personal property damage.[7]

- After a cigarette-caused fire in July 2006, an apartment building in Bloomington, Minnesota spent **nine months** rebuilding and renovating an entire building of 78 units. In order to avoid smoking-related fires and costs in the future, **the building re-opened smoke free** in April 2007.[8]

A Solution to the Problem: Smoke-Free Policies Reduce the Risk of Fire

- Smoke-free policies in apartments and other multi-family structures reduce the risk of cigarette-related fires, damages, and deaths by eliminating lighted smoking materials from the interior of the building.

[1]U.S. Fire Administration, "Residential Smoking Fires and Causalities," 2005
[2]Tobacco Control Legal Consortium, "Regulating Cigarettes for Fire Safety," 2007
[3]Minnesota Fire Marshal, "Fire in Minnesota," 2009
[4]Minnesota Fire Marshal, "Fire Fatalities," 2009

[5]Coalition for Fire-Safe Cigarettes, "Fast Facts"
[6]National Fire Protection Association, "The Smoking-Material Fire Problem," 2006
[7]WCCO TV, June 21, 2007
[8]KMSP TV, March 30, 2007

Smoke-Free Apartments:
Healthier Buildings, Happier Residents, A Smart Investment.
www.mnsmokefreehousing.org