

State Fire Marshal highlights senior safety and support programs on Grandparents Day

OSFM's "Grandparents Fire and Fall Safety Campaign" focuses on senior citizen safety

In honor of Grandparents Day, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) is highlighting the state's efforts to keep senior citizens safe.

OSFM and the Illinois "Remembering When" team are spearheading a campaign to increase awareness about senior safety in conjunction with Grandparents Day. Through the *Grandparents Fire and Fall Safety Campaign* Sept. 9-15, they hope to save more lives by bringing grandchildren and grandparents together for fire and fall safety.

"Rather than simply sending a nice card or sweet treats to grandma and grandpa, we're encouraging grandchildren and their parents to spend some time to make sure grandparents are safe from fire and fall hazards in their homes," said State Fire Marshal David Foreman. "Many senior citizen injuries and deaths from fire or falls can be prevented by following several safety tips. Take the time to make sure your loved ones are safe from these hazards."

Falls are the leading cause of injury death for Americans 65 years and older. Each year, about 35-40 percent of adults 65 and older fall at least once. In addition, as people age, they also become more likely to die in a fire-related incident. In fact, people over the age of 75 are four to five times more likely to die in a fire than younger people. According to the National Fire Protection Association, each year approximately 1,100 Americans ages 65 and older die in home fires and another 3,000 are injured. Last year in Illinois, 70 people over the age of 50 died in fire-related incidents.

The "Remembering When" program, a fire and fall prevention effort for older adults developed by the National Fire Protection Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help older adults live safely at home for as long as possible. "Remembering When" is centered around 16 key safety messages – eight fire prevention and eight fall prevention.

During the Grandparents Fire and Fall Safety Campaign, OSFM encourages people throughout the state to ensure the safety of their senior friends and family by ensuring they are aware of the following safety tips:

Fire Safety

- **Provide smokers with large, deep ashtrays.** Wet cigarette butts and ashes before emptying ashtrays into a wastebasket. Never smoke when you are lying down, drowsy or in bed.
- **Give space heaters space.** Keep them at least three feet away from anything that can burn – including you. Unplug heaters when you shut them off, leave your home or go to bed.
- **Be kitchen wise.** Wear tight-fitting or rolled-up sleeves when cooking. Use oven mitts to handle hot pans. Never leave cooking unattended.

- **Stop, drop and roll.** If your clothing catches on fire: stop (don't run), drop gently to the ground, cover your face with your hands and roll over and over to smother the flames. If you cannot do that, smother the flames with a towel or blanket.
- **Smoke alarms save lives.** Have smoke alarms installed outside all sleeping areas and on every level of your home. Test your smoke alarms once a month by pushing the test button.
- **Plan and practice your escape from fire.** Know two ways out of every room in your home. Make sure windows and doors open easily. In a fire, get out and stay out.
- **Know your local emergency number.** It may be 911 or the fire department's phone number. Once you've escaped a fire, call the fire department from a neighbor's phone.
- **Plan your escape around your abilities.** Have a telephone in your bedroom and post the local emergency number nearby in case you are trapped by fire.

Fall Prevention

- **Exercise regularly** to build strength and improve your balance and coordination. Ask your doctor about the best physical exercise for you.
- **Take your time.** Being rushed or distracted increases your chance of falling. Get out of chairs slowly. Sit a moment before you get out of your bed. Stand and get your balance before you walk.
- **Clear the way.** Stairs and walking areas free of electrical cords, shoes, clothing, books, magazines and other clutter.
- **Look out for yourself.** See an eye specialist once a year. Poor vision can increase your chance of falling. Improve the lighting in your home. Use nightlights to light the path between your bedroom and bathroom. Turn on the lights before using the stairs.
- **Slippery when wet.** Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors. Install grab bars on the wall next to the bathtub, shower and toilet. Wipe up spilled liquids immediately.
- **Throw rugs can throw you.** Use only throw rugs with rubber, non-skid backing. Always smooth out wrinkles and folds in carpeting.
- **Tread carefully.** Stairways should be lit from both top and bottom. Have easy-to-grip handrails installed along the full length of both sides of the stairs.
- **Best foot forward.** Wear sturdy, well-fitted, low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles. These are safer than high heels, thick-soled athletic shoes, slippers or stocking feet.

For more information about the Remembering Program, please contact Donna Lay at 217-558-0640 or go to the OSFM website as www.state.il.us/osfm