

Cooking fires can result from appliance glitches

Apartments often tout nice kitchen appliances as some of the amenities that make living in their multifamily residences convenient or even luxurious, but cooking is the leading cause of home fires, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. What's even more startling is that 23% of appliance fires occur because of a malfunction in the appliance itself, according to Consumer Reports

One of the scariest malfunctions is a microwave that starts on its own. The problem has been documented in multiple brands over several years and is often attributed to a failure of the control panel's wiring. If the microwave starts overnight or when residents are gone, it is a serious fire hazard. Manufacturers have not issued recalls. The problem is broad enough that apartment owners or property managers should investigate model numbers and brands that have been reported to ensure swift corrective action is taken if the models are in your residential units. There is a product available called Safe-T-sensor that quickly and easily attaches to the side of the microwave and shuts off power to the microwave at the first sign of smoke.

Ranges or cooktops are involved in the majority of cooking fires and losses, with units using electric ranges having a higher risk of cooking fires than those with gas ranges, according to the National Fire Protection Association's 2015 report on home fires involving cooking equipment. Though most cooking fires occur because of unattended food, blame also rests with shorts and other mechanical failures.

Smoke alarms and fire suppressant systems are the best ways to save lives and property. Installing smoke alarms near cooking areas can alert residents to a problem, but many disconnect the devices because they go off too frequently. If placed within 10 feet to 20 feet of a stove, a smoke alarm should be a photoelectric rather than an ionization device to help reduce false activation. You can also install alarms that have a "hush" feature so they are easier to silence if they do erroneously activate.

Stopping or slowing the spread of fire through a residential unit is key to the safety of that unit's tenants and to others living in your complex. Residential sprinklers and other automated fire suppression devices, such as the Stove Top Fire Stop, which when activated disperses a powder that puts out or significantly retards fires. For electric stovetops, SmartBurners® offer technology designed to control the temperature of the burner to below the auto ignition point of cooking oils and other food items which helps prevent a fire from starting.

Consider enhancing your fire-prevention efforts by training staff what to do in the event of a fire. You might also want to engage your apartment or condominium residents in such training to help them prevent fires and appropriately respond should one occur.

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