

Fire Prevention Week 2002

As we get ready to observe Fire Prevention Week, some may be wondering what this annual event is all about and how did it get started. The history of Fire Prevention Week has its roots in the Great Chicago Fire, which began on October 8th but continued into October 9th in 1871. This conflagration killed more than 250 people, left more than 100,000 people homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres. The old limestone water tower is the only thing left from this fire. According to popular belief Mrs. O'Leary's cow started this fire, but this was never really proven. Unfortunately, while the Great Chicago Fire is remembered it was not the biggest. While Chicago was burning a much larger fire was burning up in a little town of Peshigo, Wisconsin. It had been extremely dry in Wisconsin people had been smelling these fires out in the woods for a while. They did not worry about it since it was not affecting them. It is believed that railroad crews had accidentally started a brush fire while they were clearing land for the railroad. This brush fire eventually turned into a very large fire. As it approached Peshigo, people panicked. As they ran down the street, their clothes would begin burning from the heat. Those that jumped into the water troughs were boiled to death.

This fire eventually burned down 16 towns, killing 1200 people and scorched 1.2 million acres. It was the small town of Peshtigo that suffered the worst damage. Within one hour the entire town had been destroyed and some 800 residents lost their lives.

As we observe Fire Prevention Week, test your smoke detector and then test it on a monthly basis. You are encouraged to change the battery in your smoke detector when the clocks are set back October 27th from daylight savings to standard time. Vacuum your detector on a regular basis to keep your detector in good working order. Replace your smoke detectors every ten years. Never borrow a battery from your smoke detector. Make sure everyone in your home can hear and recognize the detector alarm and know how to react immediately. It should be noted that detectors currently in government quarters are being replaced with battery back up. It takes only a small amount of time to ensure that you and your family is fire safe.

For additional information on these and other fire prevention suggestions, contact the Fort Sill Fire & Emergency Services, Fire Prevention Branch at 442-5911 and speak with a Fire Prevention Inspector.