The week of October 3rd - October 9th is National Fire Prevention Week, and this year’s motto is “It’s Fire Prevention Week. Protect Your Family From Fire”. National Fire Prevention Week, sponsored by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), was launched in remembrance of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The Great Chicago Fire killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures, and burned more than 2,000 acres. U.S. President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the first National Fire Prevention Week in 1925.

The purpose of this year’s motto is to protect all families from the risk of home fire related injuries and deaths, especially those individuals at highest risk. Examples of people at highest risk include: immigrant populations, older adults, and people with intellectual abilities.

Below are some tips and issues the NPFA feels that all families should be aware of in order to reduce injuries and death caused by fires in the home.

Escape Planning: The NFPA states that less than 25% of Americans have developed and practiced a home fire escape plan. The NFPA strongly recommends that all families should have a fire escape plan and practice it periodically.

Working Smoke Alarms: in 2008, three out of every five home fire deaths were in a home with either no smoke alarms or where the smoke alarms were not working. In cases where the smoke alarms were not working, either batteries were missing or the detector was disconnected. NFPA states that when used properly, smoke alarms can reduce the risk of dying in a fire by half. Please make sure you check the batteries in your smoke detectors at home monthly, and replace smoke detectors every ten years. Consider installing smoke detectors that are interconnected.

Home Fire Sprinkler Systems: Automatic home fire sprinkler systems can cut the risk of dying in a home fire by 80%, because they can react to a fire so quickly. These systems can contain and may extinguish a fire in less time than it would take the fire department to arrive.

Cooking: U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 155,400 cooking-related home fires each year between 2005-2009, causing an average of 390 deaths, 4,800 injuries and $771 million in direct property damage. According to the NPFA, cooking equipment is the leading cause of home structure fires and associated injuries, and was tied for the third leading cause of home fire deaths. Unattended cooking was the leading cause of these fires.

Heating: Heating equipment was the second leading cause of all reported home fires and home fire deaths, which happen mostly during colder months of the year. The leading factor contributing to heating equipment fires was failure to clean heating equipment (primarily chimneys). Half of home heating fire deaths resulted from fires caused by heating equipment too close to things that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattresses or bedding.
Smoking materials (cigarettes): The risk of dying in a home structure fire caused by smoking materials rises with age. U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 18,900 smoking-related home fires each year between 2005-2009, causing an average of 660 deaths, 1,270 injuries and $492 million in direct property damage.

Electrical: According to the NFPA, 41% of home electrical fires involved electrical distribution or lighting equipment, and 53% of home electrical fires involved other known types of equipment, including ranges, washers/dryers, fans and space heaters.

Candles: On average, there are 35 home candle fires reported per day, and roughly two-fifths of these fires started in the bedroom. More than half of all candle fires start when things that can burn are too close to the candle.

You can obtain more information about these tips by visiting the NFPA’s Fire Prevention Week web-site at http://www.firepreventionweek.org. The NFPA site provides resources for reaching those at highest risk to fire deaths and injuries, including: instructions on how to conduct an open house for older adults, activities for reaching immigrant populations, and a FPW lesson plan for adults with developmental disabilities. There are also handouts about these tips written in several languages.