

July 28, 2010

**Media contact:** Warren Richardson, 941-232-5388; [wrichardson@scgov.net](mailto:wrichardson@scgov.net)

**Project contact:** Jane Ross, 941-861-2190, [jeross@scgov.net](mailto:jeross@scgov.net)

## Use caution with charcoal and propane grills

An accident while starting a barbecue grill on July 25 resulted in a Sarasota man being flown to Bayfront Medical Center in St. Petersburg for treatment. The man sustained first and second-degree burns over 21 percent of his body from the accident.

This recent incident is a reminder to use caution while using grills of any type.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, fire departments responded to an average of 7,900 home fires involving, grills, hibachis or barbecues per year between 2003 and 2006. This includes an average of 2,900 structure fires and 5,000 outdoor fires in or on home properties. These fires also caused an annual average of 10 civilian deaths, 120 reported injuries, and \$80 million in direct property damage. Gas grills proved to have a higher fire risk than charcoal grills, with leaks and breaks being the leading cause, accounting for nearly half of gas grill fires.

“Watch out when cooking outdoors to enjoy yourself and stay safe,” cautions Fire Marshal Jane Ross.

- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling are already ignited, and never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to start the fire.
- Periodically remove grease or fat buildup in trays below grill to prevent ignition by the hot grill.
- For charcoal grills, purchase the proper starter fluid and store it out of the reach of children, and away from heat sources.
- For propane grills, check the propane cylinder hose for leaks before using the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will quickly reveal escaping propane by releasing bubbles.
- If the grill has a gas leak and there is no flame, turn off the propane tank and grill. If the leak stops, get the grill serviced by a professional before reusing. If the leak doesn't stop, call the fire department by dialing 911. If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call the fire department. Do not attempt to move the grill.
- All propane cylinders manufactured after April 2002 must have overfill protection devices (OPDs). OPDs shut off the flow of propane before capacity is reached, limiting the potential for release of propane gas if the cylinder heats up. OPDs are easily identified by their triangular-shaped hand wheel.

- Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory and follow the manufacturer's instructions to set up the grill and maintain it.
- Never store propane cylinders in buildings or garages. If you store a gas grill inside, disconnect the cylinder and leave it outside. The only exception to this rule is during a hurricane, when the propane cylinder should be turned off and secured inside of a garage. If it is left outside, the propane cylinder must be secured with a chain to prevent it from becoming airborne.
- Position the grill well away from siding, deck railings and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.
- Place the grill a safe distance from lawn games, play areas and foot traffic.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill area; declare a three-foot "safe zone" around the grill.
- Use long-handled grilling tools giving the cook plenty of clearance from heat and flames.

Propane and charcoal BBQ grills must only be used outdoors. If used indoors or in any enclosed spaces such as tents, they pose both a fire hazard and the risk of exposing the occupants to toxic gases and potential carbon monoxide poisoning.

For further information on grilling safety, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for the Fire Prevention Office.

-end-