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Wolf Administration Urges Caution During-Holiday, Offers Safety Tips to Avoid Accidental Fires While Cooking

Harrisburg, PA – Pennsylvania Acting Insurance Commissioner Michael Humphreys, Department of Health Acting Secretary and Pennsylvania Physician General Dr. Denise Johnson, and Pennsylvania Acting State Fire Commissioner Charles McGarvey today joined Harrisburg Fire Bureau officials to offer safety advice for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

“This holiday, as we gather to celebrate with loved ones, safety for yourself, your family and your home should be a top priority,” said Acting Commissioner Humphreys. “In the event of an unfortunate accident, homeowners insurance and renters insurance will cover certain damages, but it is best to follow safety guidelines to ensure that the worst does not happen in the first place. We urge you this holiday to use caution when cooking to avoid potentially dangerous situations, prevent costly repairs, and have a happy and safe Thanksgiving.”

Every year, home chefs go into their kitchens on Thanksgiving to make a delicious meal with a turkey often the centerpiece of the holiday. However, this is not without risk, as the U.S. Fire Administration reports the average number of reported residential building fires on Thanksgiving Day is more than double (2.3 times more) the average number of fires in residential buildings on all other days. An average of 2,300 house fires occur nationwide on Thanksgiving, causing fatalities, injuries, and \$26 million in property loss.

In case the worst does occur, homeowners insurance policies will cover items like the structure of a home, personal belongings, and liability protection for injury to guests. However, filing a property damage claim may raise the homeowner’s insurance premium, and the homeowner will be responsible for paying any deductible on the policy out-of-pocket.

It is also important to note that if someone rents, belongings will not be covered unless there is a renters insurance policy. Landlord’s insurance will likely cover the building, but not any personal contents.

Many Thanksgiving home fires are due to deep-frying accidents. For some, deep frying a turkey can be a tasty alternative to the traditional oven-roasted method, but fryers pose significant risks to personal safety and property without the proper safety measures in place.

“Cooking fires remain a persistent and all-too common cause of home fires, resulting in significant damage and costs for those who experience them,” said Commissioner

McGarvey. “These incidents peak every year with the Thanksgiving holiday. Turkey fryers and inattentive cooking are consistently listed as the leading causes of these fires.”

“As a physician, I would like to also stress the importance of ensuring our safety while we prepare our upcoming holiday meals because unfortunately, foodborne illnesses are common – but fortunately, they are preventable with the proper measures,” said Dr. Johnson. “I encourage residents to clean, separate, cook, and chill their food in order to prevent themselves and others from getting sick.”

Here are some tips to keep families, guests and property safe:

- read the turkey fryer owner’s manual thoroughly for proper set up and safety tips
- make sure the turkey is completely thawed before frying (hot oil and ice/water do not mix)
- use the correct amount of oil; overfilled fryers increase the likelihood of oil spilling out of the pot and hitting the burner causing flames to engulf the entire unit
- never leave the fryer unattended; many fryers lack thermostats to prevent overheating
- do not deep fry your turkey inside your garage, on your porch or deck, or inside your home
- have an all-purpose fire extinguisher nearby; never use water to extinguish an oil fire
- keep children and pets away from all cooking surfaces
- use proper hand protection; lids and handles of the cooking pot get dangerously hot, posing severe burn hazards
- ensure full attention is dedicated to cooking; do not consume alcohol while cooking

Visit osfc.pa.gov/BeFireSafePA for more seasonal fire safety tips, and the turkey fryer factsheet.

For additional resources regarding homeowners or renters insurance, visit www.insurance.pa.gov, or call the Insurance Department’s Consumer Services Bureau at 1-877-881-6388.

For information to help avoid foodborne illness, visit www.health.pa.gov/foodborne-illness.

Media contacts: L. Paul Vezzetti, OSFC, 717-651-2169
Lindsay Bracale, Insurance, ra-in-press@pa.gov
Mark O’Neill, Health, ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov

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