



## Fire Prevention Week marked with Fire Department Open Houses, Smoke Alarm Reminder

During National Fire Prevention Week, October 6-12, the [Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office](#) reminds property owners of steps they need to be taking to protect their loved ones and property. Thomas A. Merrill, Senior Fire Dispatcher for the Town of Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office, offers these reminders at a time when fire incidents are increasing locally and across the country. This year's Fire Prevention Week theme is "[Smoke Alarms-Make Them Work for You.](#)"



"In all of 2023, there were a total of 37 significant structure fires in the town. Through September 23, of this year, there have already been 35 significant structure fires. This rise in incidents is concerning and something that my department and all the volunteer fire departments in town are working to address," said Merrill, who is also a longtime Snyder Fire Department volunteer and officer.

Cooking continues to be the leading cause of home fires in the United States and is the second leading cause of home fire deaths. Merrill said that unattended cooking was by far the leading factor in cooking fires and cooking fire casualties. Nationally, more than one-quarter of the people killed by cooking fires were asleep when they were fatally injured.

"Too often people think fires only happen to 'other people' and it cannot happen to them. It can happen to anyone, and we witness it every day in this country, and far too often in our Town. Everyone must ensure that they take the steps to prevent fires and also take the steps to be alerted of a fire. Don't let you and your family become those 'other people,'" said Merrill.

Every year an average of 3,000 civilians die in the United States from to home fires. In the last 20 years, close to 70,000 people have died due to fires.

"That's why this year's fire prevention theme is so relevant. 'Smoke Alarms-Make Them Work for You' is a simple but important message. Working smoke detectors reduce the risk of dying in a home fire by 54 percent. There is no doubt that ensuring your home is equipped with working smoke detectors is one the best methods for not just alerting you to a fire, but giving you time to escape the fire as well," Merrill added. "Working smoke detectors are the best defense weapon here."

For decades Amherst volunteer departments have been hosting open houses in conjunction with Fire Prevention Week to focus on fire safety and fire prevention. The schedule is as follows:

- [North Amherst Fire Company](#) from 10 AM—1 PM Saturday, October 5
- [East Amherst Fire Department](#) from noon– 4 PM Saturday, October 5
- [Main-Transit Fire Department](#) from noon—3 PM Saturday, October 5
- [Swormville Fire Company](#) from noon– 3 PM Saturday, October 5
- [North Bailey Vol. Fire Company](#) from 11 AM—2 PM Sunday, October 6
- [Ellicott Creek Vol. Fire Company](#) from 5:30-8:30 PM Friday, October 11
- [Snyder Fire Department](#) from noon-3 PM Sunday, October 13

[Getzville](#), [Eggertsville](#) and [Williamsville](#) fire all held open houses earlier in the summer.

During National Fire Prevention Week, Merrill offers simple tips that can save lives:

1. Have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and test them to be sure they work.
2. Have smoke detectors on every level in your home, including the basement. Ensure they are outside each sleeping area and inside each bedroom.
3. Replace smoke detectors every 10 years.
4. Have a home escape plan and ensure everyone knows what to do in case of a fire. Know at least two ways out.
5. Practice fire safety by keeping homes orderly, especially around stoves, hot water tanks and furnaces.
6. Stay awake when cooking – and, never leave the stove unattended.

“Even little things like the old-style incandescent lightbulbs on a pull string can be an issue when clothes touch it. This has caused numerous fires over the years, especially prevalent in the older areas of Amherst,” Merrill added. “Remember, don’t become complacent. Residential fires happen every 88 seconds in this country. A fatal residential house fire occurs every 3 hours and 14 minutes and a home fire injury occurs every 53 minutes.”

Through Sept. 15, 2023, there were 235 fire incidents dispatched in the territory covered by the Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office (Towns of Amherst, Clarence, Newstead and Villages of Akron and Williamsville). Included in this total were 20 significant building fires and 54 stovetop/cooking fires. By comparison, through Sept. 15, 2024 there have been 267 total fire incidents dispatched in the territory covered by the Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office. Total fire damage through Sept. 15, 2023 was \$3,800,000 and total fire damage year to date is \$4,300,950. Unfortunately, there were three fire fatalities over the past year in Amherst.

The [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#) has sponsored a public observance for Fire Prevention Week since 1922. In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed Fire Prevention Week a national observance which makes it the longest running public health initiative in the country. Every year it is observed to coincide with the October 8, 1981 Great Chicago Fire which killed more than 250 people and destroyed over 17,000 structures.

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