



# NEWS RELEASE

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## PRELIMINARY REPORTS: 4 OF 8 FIRE DEATHS THIS YEAR LIKELY SMOKING RELATED

*State Fire Marshal Asking Minnesotans to Follow Smoking Tips*

ST. PAUL — Following four fire deaths since Jan. 9 that appear to be smoking related, State Fire Marshal Jim Smith is asking Minnesotans who smoke to follow some important safety tips, and families to talk to loved ones who smoke about its fire-related dangers.

Eight people died in fires between Jan. 9 and Jan. 23. Four of these fatalities this month are likely smoking related, according to preliminary investigations. Smoking is typically the leading cause of fatal fires each year in Minnesota. There were three fire deaths at this time last year.

Follow these tips to prevent a smoking-related fire:

- Smoke outside and extinguish cigarettes in a sturdy ashtray filled with sand or water.
- Do not discard cigarettes in potted plants, leaves, mulch or other vegetation.
- Do not smoke while on oxygen or while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

“I was a smoker for 30 years. I know how hard it is to quit,” State Fire Marshal Smith said. “But it’s not hard to smoke outside and properly extinguish your cigarettes in a sturdy container filled with sand or water. It’s not hard to talk to your loved ones who smoke and ask them to do these things.”

### **This year’s fire deaths**

#### Jan. 9

Maple Grove  
80-year-old female victim  
Preliminary cause: Smoking

#### Jan. 14

Montevideo  
83-year-old female victim  
Preliminary cause: Smoking

#### Jan. 12

Elk River  
54-year-old male victim  
Preliminary cause: Unsafe use of heat

#### Jan. 18

Eveleth  
77-year-old female victim  
Preliminary cause: Smoking

#### Zimmerman

63-year-old female victim  
Preliminary cause: Outdoor burning

#### Jan. 18

St. Paul  
29-year-old male victim  
Preliminary cause: Smoking

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- Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Minnesota State Patrol
- Office of Communications
- Office of Justice Programs
- Office of Pipeline Safety
- Office of Traffic Safety
- State Fire Marshal

## Fire deaths update

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Jan. 23

Big Fork

93-year-old male victim

66-year-old female victim

Preliminary cause: Propane explosion

Preliminary investigations also indicate **seven of the eight victims who died in fires this year are over age 50**. The average age of victims who died in smoking-related fires between 2009 and 2019 is 61.

“These deaths are often happening to vulnerable people who are alone,” Smith said. “That’s why we are asking family members and anyone in contact with older smokers to look in on them and help them be safe.”

### Smoking is the leading cause of fatal fires in Minnesota

At least seven people died in smoking-related fires in 2019. That number could rise as investigators continue determining fire causes.

Ninety-four people died in smoking-related fires between 2009 and 2019.

- **81 percent** of those victims were over age 50.
- **43 percent** of people who died had a measurable blood-alcohol content (BAC); **40 percent** of those had a BAC over .08.

### Smoking-related fire deaths by year

- |            |                         |
|------------|-------------------------|
| • 2009: 10 | • 2015: 9               |
| • 2010: 7  | • 2016: 7               |
| • 2011: 10 | • 2017: 11              |
| • 2012: 10 | • 2018: 9               |
| • 2013: 6  | • 2019: 7 (preliminary) |
| • 2014: 8  | • 2020: 4 (preliminary) |

“Smoking can kill you more ways than one,” Smith said. “Year after year, people die in preventable smoking-related fires and, to be honest, it’s frustrating.”

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