

Fire Safety Tips for Using Microwave Ovens

Microwave ovens are used every day, both at home and in the workplace. When used properly, the microwave is safe and convenient for heating a variety of foods in a short time. When you become complacent about microwave safety, however, your appliance can cause painful burns and become a potential fire hazard.

The following tips will help make the use of your microwave oven a safe method of food preparation.

- Before using a new microwave oven, always read the manufacturers operating procedures and safety precautions first.
- To minimize risk of fire, never attempt to heat articles that are not approved for use in microwave ovens.
- Remove food from packaging before defrosting in a microwave oven. Do not use plastic storage containers, foam trays and plastic wraps in microwave ovens because they are not heat stable at high temperatures. Melting or warping can occur which may cause harmful chemicals to migrate into the food.
- Never use recycled paper products in microwave ovens unless they are specifically approved for microwave use. Some recycled products including paper towels and even waxed paper may contain minute metal flecks. When a microwave oven is operating, the interaction between microwaves and the metal can cause sparks and even flames.
- Do not leave a microwave oven unattended when microwaving popcorn, since the heat buildup can cause fires. Heat the popcorn according to the written instructions, but begin with the minimum time specified because some microwaves can scorch popcorn in as little as two minutes.
- If you have a fire in your microwave oven, turn it off immediately. This will stop the fan so it won't feed oxygen to the flames. Then simply wait until the fire suffocates. Never open the oven door until you are absolutely certain that the fire is out. If in doubt, call the fire department.
- Use only microwave-safe utensils. The instructions that come with each microwave oven specify what kinds of containers are safe to use and how to test the suitability of materials before use.
- Always use oven mitts to remove items from the microwave oven after cooking. Be careful when removing a wrapping or covering from a hot item. Hot steam escaping from the container, as the covering is lifted, can cause painful burns.
- Be careful when heating liquids in the microwave oven. Since the containers may only feel warm, rather than hot, they are sometimes handled with less caution. This can easily result in the splashing or spilling of a scalding liquid.
- Before allowing children to operate a microwave oven, make sure that they are instructed in the proper use, and that they are tall enough to reach the oven and handle foods safely. Over 500 of those burned using microwave ovens are under 5 years of age.

If you have any questions concerning microwave oven fire safety and burn prevention, please contact the Fire Marshal, at 856-845-0066.