

FIRE ANNUALLY DAMAGES MORE THAN 2,000 CLUBS

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The National Fire Protection Association has just completed a study of country club fires reported to the NFPA over a five-year period.

The study shows that more than 2,000 clubhouses annually suffer fire damage. The club buildings burned range in value from a few thousand to several hundred thousand dollars. The fire losses range from less than a hundred dollars to several hundred thousand dollars.

One third of the known causes of country club fires involved carelessly discarded smoking materials. Burning cigarettes were accidentally dropped on upholstered furniture, or ash trays were emptied into open rubbish containers and left inside the building. The cigarettes smoldered for a time and ignited the furniture or other combustibles next to them. Usually the fires gained considerable headway before discovery.

Fires from careless cooking operations or defective cooking equipment, and fires caused by electrical faults tied for second in frequency, each contributing 16.9 per cent of the known causes. Although 25.3 per cent of the country club fires started in the kitchens, all kitchen fires were not related to cooking operations. Some were caused by such things as careless smoking and defective electrical wiring.

Defective heating equipment was the fourth largest cause of fires, accounting for 10.2 per cent. Other frequent causes included arson, combustibles left too near heating equipment and mishandling flammable liquids.

Besides the time allowed for spread of fire when detection and alarm are

delayed, the construction features of the building and the interior finish and furnishings can be a major factor in fire spread. Attractive wood paneling and combustible fiberboard acoustical tile aid in the fast spread of fire as do highly combustible draperies and other furnishings.

Construction Is Factor

Wooden buildings were involved in 66.3 per cent of the country club fires in the five-year period covered by the study. Masonry, wood-joisted buildings burned in 22.5 per cent of the fires. The remaining 11.2 per cent were of mixed construction, fire resistant, or noncombustible.

Fire reports which listed interior finish or contents as a factor influencing the spread of fire reported combustible interior finish as an important factor in 80 per cent of the fires.

If a country club is what the name implies, it will be in the country, remote from fire stations and public hydrant systems. In 27 per cent of the cases reported the long running distance from fire station to fire site was a factor in delaying the beginning of fire fighting operations.

Public water supplies were available in only 62.5 per cent of the cases, and this supply was inadequate at the location in 28.6 per cent of the fires in which public supplies were available. Inadequacies in public water supplies usually occurred because the clubs were located at or near the end of dead end mains or because the mains were too small.

Private water systems were used at 12.5 per cent of the fires. In about half of these cases, the nearest water supplies were inadequate.

Ponds, creeks, swimming pools, and other bodies of water provided supplies for fire fighting streams at 10.2 per cent of the fires. There was no water supply available other than tanks on fire apparatus in 14.8 per cent of the cases.

Automatic fire detection and automatic sprinkler systems are especially important in country clubs, since a great number of the clubs are without public fire protection and water supply systems. The isolated locations of some clubhouses also cause delayed discovery of fire if there is no watchman or central station supervised detection and alarm service.

Many fires are promptly extinguished by portable extinguishers and never become "statistics." Sometimes a small fire becomes a big fire because there is no extinguisher available. Sometimes a small fire becomes a big fire because occupants use portable extinguishers before calling the fire department on fires that are too far advanced before discovery.

The following table should prove enlightening:
COUNTRY CLUB FIRES

CAUSE OF FIRE	Per Cent
Smoking	32.2
Cooking, cooking equipment	16.9
Electrical faults	16.9
Heating equipment faults	10.2
Arson	8.5
Combustibles too near heating equipment	6.8

Flammable liquids mishandled	3.4
Miscellaneous	5.1
PLACE OF ORIGIN OF FIRE	
Kitchen	25.3
Heating equipment room	13.3
Activity rooms	12.1
Storage rooms	10.9
Locker rooms	8.4
Attic, walls, roof, etc.	7.2
Lounges	7.2
Outbuildings	6.0
Living quarters	4.8
Miscellaneous	4.8
INTERIOR FINISH and FURNISHINGS	
INFLUENCING FIRE SPREAD	
Wood, wood paneling	30.9
Combustible fiberboard	27.3
Furnishings, draperies, etc.	20.0
Combustible interior finish not otherwise reported	21.8
FIRE PROTECTION	
Fire Department Response	
Running distance long	27.0
Road conditions bad	3.0
Department inadequate	4.0
No fire department	1.0
WATER SUPPLIES	
Inadequate	31.5
No water supply other than fire apparatus	14.8



Top right, an electrical fault caused this fire to claim a clubhouse in Haverhill, Mass., in 1960 at a loss of \$250,000. At the bottom, fire devoured clubhouse near Charleston, Ill., in 1959 for a loss of \$75,000.