



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Cigarette Blamed for Fatal Fire in Tigard**

A Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue investigator has determined that an improperly disposed of cigarette caused a fire that killed a woman in Tigard last month.

The tragic fire occurred in a condominium at 15225 SW 94th in Tigard's Summerfield Community around 3:00 a.m. on February 20th.

The fire fight was complicated by arcing electrical lines, but because of a quick response time by firefighters, the flames were controlled in seven minutes. As firefighters fought the flames, they also entered the home and searched through the smoke for possible victims. They found a 70 year-old female on the floor and rushed her from the home. Paramedics quickly determined that she was deceased.

An aggressive response from firefighters and fire walls between the attached units limited the fire primarily to the unit of origin. There were no other injuries.

Investigators determined that the fire originated in a spare bedroom in the condominium where the woman frequently smoked and disposed of her cigarette butts.

"Our hearts go out to this woman's family," says TVF&R Public Information Officer Brian Barker, "we've seen a number of fires caused by cigarettes recently, and they're all preventable. People don't realize that the only safe way to extinguish and discard your cigarettes is in an ashtray or appropriate metal container with a lid."

According to statistics from the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office, during 2005-2009 there were almost 6,400 cigarette fires in the state. These fires were responsible for 34 deaths, 133 injuries, and an estimated \$20 million in property loss.

The day after the fire, firefighters canvassed the neighborhood and knocked on the doors of neighbors answering questions about the incident and offering to check smoke alarms. Firefighters were concerned to find that roughly 25% of the smoke alarms they tested didn't work and needed replacing. Firefighters replaced all of the non-working smoke alarms they found.

"Although the fire in Tigard started inside the residence, many of the cigarette-caused fires we're seeing begin outside of the home as well," Barker says, "it appears that smokers believe they are doing the right thing by smoking outside but are not disposing of their cigarettes properly. Many of these fires start outside and then burn their way into a house or apartment."

Of all cigarette fires responded to by Oregon structure fire agencies, the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office reports, 82% of the fires started outside of a home; 15% are structure fires, and 2% are vehicle or other fires.

TVF&R reminds you of the following tips regarding smoking:

- Use caution when smoking and discarding cigarettes. A cigarette is in essence an open flame.
- Extinguish and discard of your cigarettes in an ashtray or appropriate metal container with a lid.
- Do not use plant containers as an ashtray. Potting soil contains organic material and has the potential to ignite.
- Consider soaking cigarettes in water before discarding.
- Never smoke in bed or when drowsy.