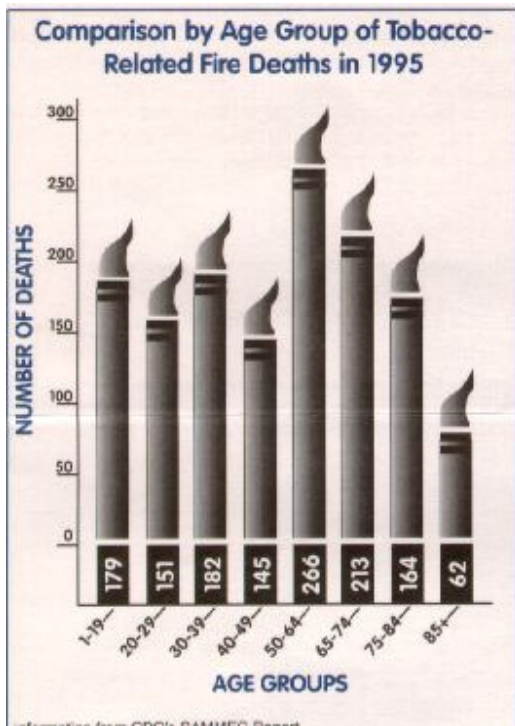


# SMOKING-RELATED FIRE TRAGEDIES

The headlines tell the tragic stories of smoking-related fires across this country:



## Elderly Woman Killed After Cigarette Ignites Blaze

On August 12, 1997, a 78 year old Los Angeles area woman confined to a wheelchair died in an apartment fire caused by her smoking in bed, according to fire officials. The blaze in the 3-story apartment building caused an estimated \$20,000 in damages.

## Cigarette Ashes Cause 4 Alarm Fire in San Francisco Hotel

The same night in San Francisco, a 4-alarm fire roared through a residential hotel, forcing 350 people into the street and into emergency shelters. An elderly resident of the hotel who complained of shortness of breath said, "I didn't think I was going to make it." after escaping from the raging fire.

Fire investigators said a careless 32 year old smoker sparked the blaze by leaving a cigarette unattended in his room in the 5-story hotel, where the cigarette ashes smoldered for hours before erupting into flames. The police said the negligent smoker could face criminal charges.

Injuries sent many hotel residents to three hospitals for treatment of cuts, bruises and smoke inhalation. Some residents assisted in evacuating others, helping to carry or wheel out injured and elderly occupants. The Red Cross set up an emergency shelter at a nearby recreation center. Many residents tried to return to the hotel to reclaim belongings, but those who lived on the top floors lost nearly everything.

## Tobacco President's \$1 Million Home Lost to Fire Caused by Cig

In one of those ironies that make you wonder about justice in nature, in April, 1997, the \$1 million luxury vacation home of R.J Reynolds Tobacco Co. president Andrew Schindler burned to the ground on Figure Eight Island in North Carolina. The reported cause of the blaze was a workman's discarded cigarette butt. R.J. Reynolds makes Camel, Winston and Salem cigarettes; the company also reportedly developed a fire-resistant cigarette, but has failed to market it.

# 700+ELDER-VICTIMS OF TOBACCO-RELATED FIRES

## *Smoking-Related Fires Threat to Smokers and Non-Smokers*

Almost 1,400 people died in the United States in 1995 from burns caused by fires started by smoking, and thousands more suffered burns that were not fatal. Of these deaths, over 700 occurred to persons aged 50 and over, with almost 440 of these deaths to persons aged 65 and over.

Three years earlier, in 1992, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), reported that over 163,000 fires were caused by cigarettes, pipes, cigars and other smoking-related devices. These fires resulted in 1,075 deaths, 3,232 persons being injured and \$318 million in direct property damage.

**Smoking is the number one cause of fires that kill older Americans.** Likewise, smoking materials are the leading cause of fire deaths among Americans of all ages, and the second-leading cause of non-fatal injuries related to household fires. As a result of these fires, thousands of people, including many elderly persons, are left with their possessions burned and no where to stay.

The NFPA states that the 65+ age group is twice as likely to die or be injured in a fire as are younger adults. Further, the risk of death or injury from fire goes up with age -- people age 75 and over are three times as likely to die in a fire as younger adults; at age 85 and older, four times as likely.

Thus, not only is smoking a serious health hazard, the fires that result from smoking are a serious threat to the health and safety of both smokers and non-smokers who happen to live in the same building or nearby buildings.

Tobacco-related fires are most often started when lit cigarettes, cigars or pipes or their ashes drop onto furniture, beds or rugs and smolder until a fire starts. An ember can smolder for hours

before it bursts into flames -- often after the smoker or other household members have gone to sleep.

In addition to the direct danger from smoking-produced fires, toxic fumes from the smoldering smoke can overcome the smoker before the fire even gets started. Thus, the smoker may be incapacitated and unable to put out the fire before it spreads and before automatic sprinklers or other fire protection systems are activated.

The elderly are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of smoking-related fires for a number of reasons:

1. The skin of older persons is thinner and more vulnerable to fire.
2. The reflexes of older persons slow down, and this can make fast exits from a fire more difficult.
3. Older people are more likely to be on medication that makes them drowsy. This is exacerbated if the medication is combined with alcohol or smoking.

The dangers of smoking-related fires are just one more reason for smokers to quit. And, because non-smokers are also threatened by smoking-related fires, this is a compelling reason for adopting no smoking policies in common areas of apartment buildings, elderly housing facilities, Senior Centers, and other public areas of buildings used by all persons.

Inasmuch as hundreds of thousands of fires are started every year by cigarettes -- with the resultant death, injury and property loss -- it would seem sensible for the tobacco industry to have developed a cigarette that was fire-resistant; a cigarette that would go out when it wasn't being actively smoked/puffed on. In fact, they did, according to secret records disclosed recently. But, they didn't market it.