

Kiwi kitchens remain house fire hot spots – AA Insurance

Number of house fire claims up over past 12 months

Auckland, 30 June 2014 – While Kiwis love to watch cooking shows, they aren't always so attentive when it comes to their own cooking, with one third of all home fires starting in the kitchen, according to AA Insurance.

In the 12 months to the end of May, AA Insurance handled over \$4.6 million worth of home fire claims involving 100 properties*, with around 30 of these starting in the kitchen. This is an increase of \$1.2 million over the same period last year, when there was around \$3.4 million in claims involving 79 home fires. Again, a third of all these home fires started in the kitchen.

“The number of fires may seem small but the damage can be devastating, not only to a home, but also to everyday or irreplaceable household belongings. Kitchen fires can even potentially lead to loss of life,” said Suzanne Wolton, Head of Customer Relations, AA Insurance. “Home chefs love to watch their cooking shows, but if they don't keep a close eye on things in their own kitchen they may serve up fire and smoke damage instead of a tasty meal.

“People say a watched pot never boils, but an empty pot can boil dry and catch fire. Our claims data shows if you take your eyes off it for too long, or walk away from the kitchen, it could spell tragedy.”

In one claim example the grandson of a customer left a pot on the stove unattended. The pot handle melted and burnt the curtains, blinds and blackened the ceiling. The grandson panicked, took the pot outside and, in his haste, caused damage to the plate glass in the porch-way. Total cost for this inattention: almost \$12,500, total time to burn: less than an hour.

The New Zealand Fire Service does not recommend installing a smoke alarm in your kitchen - as the smoke and heat from cooking can activate it. “This means Kiwis need to be more vigilant with their cooking,” said Suzanne. “As the NZFS says, ‘if you must leave the room, turn off the stove!’ “

While these kinds of fires happen all too often, the good news is that the number of Kiwis who have smoke alarms in their homes is actually rising. A recent AA Insurance home security survey, which polled 1,000 regular Kiwi homeowner and renters aged 18 years and over, found 93% of Kiwis have smoke alarms, a rise of two per cent since last year.

The survey found that two in five Kiwis don't realise they would still be covered by their insurance if they didn't have a smoke alarm installed in their home.

“While we support all homes having working, long life photoelectric smoke alarms, if you do not have any smoke alarms installed and your home suffers fire damage, AA Insurance will still cover your home up to its maximum sum insured,” continued Suzanne.

“However, insurance can't replace the irreplaceable and a house fire can be very traumatic. We strongly recommend installing long life smoke alarms and, most importantly, regularly checking batteries to help keep people and homes safe,” she said. “Most house fires are avoidable, so being aware of possible safety risks, and preventative measures like alarms and extinguishers, will ensure you and your home are protected.”

AA Insurance Household Fire Safety Tips:

- If you haven't got long life photoelectric smoke alarms, buy and install them immediately. Also test them regularly to ensure they operate effectively.
- Keep looking when you're cooking – a frying pan of oil can ignite in under 60 seconds
- Get a fire extinguisher and learn how to use it. Already have one? Check it each year to see that it's in good working order
- Don't overload multi-boards and always untangle appliance cords to make sure there's no fraying
- Turn off all non-essential electrical appliances at the wall before you go to bed or work

...and in winter:

- Always turn off your electric blanket before getting into bed
- Remember the heater-metre rule. Keep furniture, clothing, curtains and toys a metre away from heaters and fireplaces



- Have your chimney swept regularly and use a steel bin for disposing of the ashes

For more information on home fire safety visit www.fire.org.nz

*Claims data is for house fires only, and does not include the damage caused to household belongings.

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About AA Insurance

AA Insurance Limited launched in 1994 and is a joint venture between the New Zealand Automobile Association and Vero New Zealand, which is part of the Suncorp Group. We employ around 580 staff to look after 320,000 customers and around 580,000 car, home and contents policies.

AA Insurance has been consistently recognised by Reader's Digest Most Trusted Brands (since 2011), NZ Direct Insurer Award (since 2012), Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey (since 2008), and Canstar Blue Most Satisfied Customers (since 2011).

We proudly support youth charity Blue Light, and the Holden Cup and NRL Telstra Premiership referees in New Zealand.

AA Insurance has an A+ (Strong) Insurer Financial Strength Rating given by Standard and Poor's (Australia) Pty Ltd. For further information visit www.aainsurance.co.nz.

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