

One in seven major fires start in garages – AA Insurance

Auckland – 23 May 2017 – AA Insurance is warning Kiwis to take care with electrics in garages - especially if they've been converted into extra rooms and sleepouts - after a number of significant fires.

In the last 12 months, up to 15% of major fire claims handled by AA Insurance started in garages, with some spreading to the family home and resulting in the total loss of their house and belongings.

“Knowing that some New Zealanders are converting garages into additional rooms to their homes, we strongly recommend they check the electrics are up to scratch, and don't overload power sockets or multi-boards,” says Amelia Macandrew, Customer Relations Manager, for AA Insurance. “Garages, as well as sheds, tend to have fewer power sockets available than in the main house, so it's really important to use them appropriately, and ensure they aren't covered to prevent overheating.”

AA Insurance's claims data shows that while the majority of house fires start in the kitchen, garage fires are less likely to be detected as quickly because they're not as well used, and are sometimes not connected to the main dwelling.

“Many kitchen fires are discovered before they spread to the rest of the house when a person remembers they've left something on the stove,” she says. “Conversely, people come and go from their garage, so may not be aware of a fire until it's too late.

Homes with detached garages are just as susceptible to fire damage. It can be alarming how quick and easy it is for fire to jump from one building to another, as one customer and his family discovered.

He woke one night to discover his standalone garage ablaze, after forgetting to disconnect an extension cord from a power socket and hot plate used to smoke fish earlier in the day. It had arced and caused a fire that quickly spread from the garage to the roof of the house, razing it to the ground. Thankfully the customer and his family had evacuated their home, and were covered by their full replacement policy for \$665,000, including temporary accommodation.

As well as a place for parking vehicles, most Kiwis tend to use their garages as some form of storage, so have a lot of flammable items sitting around. They also use it as a place to house their washer, dryer and other appliances that they turn on and leave unattended. As well as having fewer power sockets, garages

are also less likely to benefit from working smoke alarms or an up-to-date electrician's inspection when compared to the main house.

One customer learnt the hard way about poor building maintenance when he received a call from his property manager about his tenanted, two-storey property with a garage and storage shed that had been destroyed by fire overnight. It was discovered that the electrical wiring of the main power supply, which serviced the sub-main in the garage, had been overloaded, arced and caused \$80,000 worth of fire damage.

"While losing your entire home to a fire is rare, when it does happen it's devastating for those involved," says Amelia. "So it really does pay to do all you can to improve the safety of your home, including your garage and sheds, to prevent or mitigate the worst from happening."

AA Insurance fire safety tips for your garage, and shed:

- When you've finished using appliances, turn them off at the main and unplug them to be extra careful.
- Don't overload plugs or multi-boards, and don't cover them as they may overheat.
- Have an electrician check your wiring, particularly if it's old, and add additional power outlets if you need them.
- De-clutter your garage or storage shed, not only to remove excess items that burn easily like old clothes, books and paint, but to also give you quicker outdoor access if you need to get out in a hurry.
- If you haven't got a heat alarm in your garage buy and install them immediately; they are used where smoke alarms could mistakenly activate such as in kitchens, laundries and garages. However, no matter the type of alarm, test them regularly to ensure they operate effectively.
- 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.
- If you've added new items to your garage/shed, or made some renovations, check you have enough insurance cover. An online calculator can help you work this out.

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



About AA Insurance

AA Insurance has demonstrated trusted expertise in home, contents, and car insurance in New Zealand since launching in 1994. We're a joint venture between New Zealand Automobile Association and Suncorp Group, and we employ over 650 staff - who are all based in New Zealand - to look after nearly 350,000 customers and over 650,000 policies.

We proudly support youth charity Blue Light, and have been consistently recognised by: Reader's Digest Most Trusted Brands (since 2011), NZ Insurance Industry Awards (since 2012), IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey (since 2008), Canstar Blue Most Satisfied Customers (2011-2016), and the Colmar Brunton Corporate Reputation Index (since 2015) that recognises New Zealand's most successful companies.

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.

For more information please contact:

Arwen Vant, Botica Butler Raudon Partners, (09) 303 3862, 021 484 232 or email arwenv@botica.co.nz

Amanda Fifield, AA Insurance Limited, (09) 927 2085 or email Amanda_Fifield@aainsurance.co.nz