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Grilling out? Be a safe chef

By MEGGAN BREWSTER, Hub Intern

KEARNEY — Barbecue chefs need to take precautions before firing up their grills and outdoor fireplaces.

Fire Administrator Ken Tracy said that the first precautions to be taken should occur before flames are even lit.

“The first thing is to be aware of the dangers that barbecue grills can pose,” he said. “That’s No. 1.”

Tracy has been Kearney Volunteer Fire Department’s fire administrator for 14 years, and has served as a volunteer firefighter for 20 years.

Whether using a gas or a charcoal grill, Tracy said, it’s wise to abide by some basic rules.

These include never using a grill indoors, in a carport, or in a garage. The grill should be kept at least 10 feet from any structure and should not be operated under or on top of wooden decks or any other surface that will burn. A grill should never be left unattended.

For gas grills, Tracy said, owners must remember to check all hoses, tubes, connectors and valves and make sure they are in working condition.

Just as importantly, owners must check for gas leaks. Tracy said KVFD recently has been called to attend to a couple of gas grills for this reason.

As outdoor fireplaces are becoming more common, grills are not the only things the fire department may have to worry about.

Outdoor fireplaces, also called portable fire pits and chimineas, have not been a problem yet, although Tracy said KVFD recently responded to two calls involving them.

“Fortunately we haven’t had a lot of calls to these,” Tracy said. “If they are used properly, they’re OK.”

However, if not used properly, outdoor fireplaces can be dangerous.

Outdoor fireplaces are fueled by wood, and Tracy said that the common mistake people make with these fireplaces is that of overloading them.

Tracy said they are not designed for bonfires or for burning items such as leaves and grass or household trash.

“They’re for a small, campfire type situation,” he said.

Additionally, the fireplace is required to be completely enclosed by a steel screen cover and should be under the supervision of a person at least age 18 at all times. To extinguish the fire, Tracy said water would do the trick.

Grills and outdoor fireplaces should be kept away from anything that may allow a fire to spread. However, if a fire gets out of control, people should evacuate, call the fire department and inform any other people in the immediate area.

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Hub photo by Meggan Brewster
Check for safety before lighting a barbecue grill, a Kearney fire official said.

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