

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 2, 1974

## Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK, 1974

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## A PROCLAMATION

Losses by destructive fires, many of which could have been prevented, constitute a tragic waste of our Nation's human and material resources. Destructive fire is a burden affecting all Americans and constitutes a public health and safety problem of major magnitude.

Our great Nation, blessed with unparalleled technological resources, has the highest per capita rate of death and property loss from fire of all the major industrialized nations in the world. Of most concern is the needless loss of human life. Each year over 12,000 Americans die and over 300,000 are seriously injured and maimed. The tragic part is that the large majority of the deaths and injuries victimize the very young and the aged. In 1973, nearly 2.7 million fires caused in excess of \$3 billion in direct property damage, with the total costs of fire, including fire departments costs, estimated at well over \$11 billion.

I believe that our continuing high rate of losses due to fire is totally unacceptable. This shameful and needless waste of our people and resources, with its adverse effect on our economy, is one which our Nation and local communities can ill afford. As I have stated before, curbing inflation and improving the state of our economy are the highest priorities in this Administration. Fire loss reduction and fire prevention are activities directly related to reducing economic loss and should be a part of our overall national effort.

Of vital concern, and an area in which there is a major need for improved fire safety, is the place where we live: our homes. Each year, more than half the deaths caused by fire -- about 6,600 on the average -- have occurred in our homes. Last year alone, 73 per cent of all building fires occurred in residences while the loss and damage to homes amounted to more than \$1 billion. For the last 20 years, home fires have accounted for about two-thirds of all building fires. Improved home fire safety is essential if we are to control this human and economic waste.

Most fires are caused by carelessness, lack of knowledge, or hazardous conditions which can be corrected. Much of the tragic waste associated with unwanted fires can be avoided. More emphasis on fire prevention programs and activities throughout the country is needed. Vigorous community fire departments, both paid and volunteer, which have effectively conducted fire prevention programs have contributed substantially to the local and national welfare by reducing significantly the number and effects of

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destructive fires. Those fire departments which confine their roles to putting out fires and rescuing its victims need to expend more effort on fire prevention. This should include educating children on the principles of fire safety, educating adults on fire safety in homes through residential inspections, enforcing fire protection and prevention codes and standards, and ensuring that adequate fire safety features are designed into our buildings and structures. All citizens need to know the basics of fire prevention, how to report fires, how to extinguish simple fires, and how to react if fire occurs in their homes or places of work. Progress can be made in reducing our fire losses if every American recognizes his and her responsibility for eliminating fire hazards and for participating in the community fire prevention programs. Therefore, it is vital that everyone support and participate in local fire prevention activities, not only during Fire Prevention Week, but at all times. In this way we can reduce the needless losses caused by unwanted fires.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate the week beginning October 6, 1974, as Fire Prevention Week.

I call upon all citizens, individually and as a Nation, to support, participate in, and promote the fire prevention programs and activities of their local community fire departments and of the National Fire Protection Association.

I urge state and local governments, business, labor, and other organizations, as well as schools, civic groups, and public information agencies, to observe Fire Prevention Week, to provide useful fire safety information to the public, and to enlist the active participation of all citizens in year-round fire prevention programs.

I also urge all Federal agencies, in cooperation with the Federal Fire Council, to set an example for the Nation by conducting effective year-round fire prevention programs, including employee fire safety training programs and drills.

Let us all work together in reducing the unnecessary waste of human life and property from fire.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this second day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred ninety-ninth.

GERALD R. FORD

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