

It's National Fire Prevention Week

By Casey Hays
staff writer

As our world fills with more and more chemicals, the risk of toxic fumes from building fire increases. The fumes can mean disorientation or even death to victims.

Those that survive usually have severe injuries, according to Lt. Peter Baldwin of the Farmington Hills Fire Department. "The injuries can be very devastating," he said. "Typically, there's scarring and sometimes long-term disability."

The common by-product of all fires, carbon monoxide, combined with modern-day chemicals, creates a deadly atmosphere for human life, especially at night, when most fatal house fires occur.

Most victims are overcome by smoke and its by-products; they do not burn to death. "Carbon monoxide has the uncanny knack of disorienting people," Baldwin said. "The damage is not in the fire itself. There may be no noise or heat — you could literally just not wake up."

In 726,000 house fires across the United States last year, 6,000 people died and 30,000 were injured, according to national statistics. Next week, Oct. 5-11, is National Fire Prevention Week. Baldwin suggests the Farmington Hills Fire Department and communities get involved by learning more about fire safety.

To make the public knowledgeable and aware of fire safety, Farmington Hills Fire Department is hosting an open house Sunday at fire headquarters (see related story).

Last year, 1,500 attended the event, Baldwin said.

In conjunction with the national awareness program, Hills firefighter Mike Garr is coordinating fall fire safety programs at area elementary schools and day care centers in both Farmington and Farmington Hills. Students will

learn about fire safety in their homes and what they need to know to save themselves.

THE EDUCATIONAL program, offered to local schools and groups in the fall and spring, is important, Baldwin and Farmington Fire Marshal Michael Wiggins said. They (the students) will carry it (fire safety information) with them," Baldwin said. "People need to be aware of the danger in their lives."

"What the Hills is providing is excellent fire safety education," Wiggins said, "but it should be continuous. Why not (teach) the high schoolers?"

The Farmington Department of Public Safety has set a goal this year to inspect each commercial building and is continuing to offer residential fire inspections and safety checks on request, according to Wiggins.

Cooking, electrical and home heating fires and those caused by careless smoking are the major causes of residential fires, according to Baldwin and Wiggins. They're usually preventable.

Stove fires are caused mainly by oil or grease being heated in a shallow pan. "They need to use a proper pan and attend it," Baldwin said. "Usually, they walk away and it tends to ignite."

Wiggins suggests the case of a fire confined to a pan, that a lid be placed on the pan and the pan be allowed to cool. Many burn injuries occur when "somebody tries to move the pan outside."

IF TIE fire has moved out of the pan, a kitchen fire extinguisher may be the answer, Baldwin said. This is safer than relying on kitchen products, he said. "Remember, because too often, people use anything within reach — including water, which will spread a grease fire, or flour, which is a flammable substance that can cause a fire to explode."

Electrical fires are caused by

appliances that are used incorrectly, or that haven't been checked and may have a problem, Baldwin said.

They can also be caused by the incorrect installation of blow-in attic insulation, Wiggins said. Wiggins suggested a homeowner have the insulation inspected either by the fire department or a qualified electrician upon completion, to be sure it is not touching electrical

boxes or wiring. Electrical appliances should also be checked periodically, Baldwin added.

Heating-related fires are not started in the furnace or hot water heating units, Baldwin said, but in surrounding areas where combustible and flammable materials are often stored.

Both fire officials recommend smoke detectors as the major life-saving element for every house-

hold. In Farmington, a 1978 ordinance was adopted requiring a smoke detector be placed in each sleeping area of the house and at the base of each stairwell, according to Wiggins.

Baldwin said the ideal situation is to have a detector placed on every floor. The Farmington Hills building code requires any house built after 1978 to have a smoke detector on each floor, fire officials

said.

The Hills offers free smoke detectors to its residents as part of the city's fire prevention and safety programs, Baldwin said. They are available through the community development office at 473-9503.

As additional measures, some residents install fire sprinkling systems or purchase escape ladders, Baldwin added.

Experts offer fire safety precautions

People once thought "the chance of a fire in their home was remote," Lt. Peter Baldwin of the Farmington Hills Fire Department said. "Today, they indeed realize it can happen to them."

There are many preventive techniques recommended by fire fighting experts, and they suggest families follow the "three P's of fire safety":

• **Plan** — develop a family fire escape plan. Practice using your plan every few months.

• **Prevent** — do a top-to-bottom, attic-to-basement and garage inspection of your home. Fix any potential fire hazards.

• **Protect** — use smoke detectors and have fire extinguishers handy.

Having the smoke detectors and extinguishers is not enough, if that workable plan is not ready when the detector sounds, officials said.

The National Fire Protection Association recommends the following process be followed before a fire has the chance to occur:

• **Draw** a floor plan of your house and identify two routes of escape from each room, especially the bedroom. Explain the exit drill so everyone understands and prearrange a safe place for your

family to meet outside.

• If the second way out of a two-story house is a window, invest in a safety ladder from a local hardware or department store.

• Remember an elevator is never a "way out" during a fire, because elevators may become trapped between floors or take you directly to the fire floor.

If you discover or suspect fire in

your house, firefighters urge that you:

• Sound an alarm to alert all occupants.

• Evacuate the building without stopping for anything and do not re-enter.

• If there is smoke, stay low where the air will be cooler and less smoky.

• Feel the door. If it's hot or if smoke is coming through cracks,

do not open it. Immediately use an alternate escape route.

• Be sure the fire department is called from a neighbor's house.

• If smoke or heat block any escape, stay in the room and close the door. Seal cracks around the door with sheets, blankets or clothing. Wave another sheet, blanket or large piece of clothing from the window to signal for help. Until help arrives, stay low to the floor.

Open house set for Sunday

Aerial shows, kitchen fires, crash/rescue events, a Bert and Ernie puppet show, even crawls through a smoke house, will be part of the Farmington Hills Fire Department's open house Sunday, Oct. 5, during National Fire Prevention Week.

The open house will run from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday at fire headquarters, 28711 Drake, north of 12 Mile. Door prizes will be free. Bring your camera. Parking will be available on Drake Road and in nearby subdivisions.

The schedule of events follows:

- noon — doors open.
- 12:30 p.m. — aerial show.
- 12:45 p.m. — kitchen fire.
- 1 p.m. — crash/rescue event.

• 1:15 p.m. — ladder demonstration.

• 1:30 p.m. — arrival of Ronald McDonald.

• 2:30 p.m. — aerial show.

• 2:45 p.m. — kitchen fire.

• 3 p.m. — crash/rescue event.

• 3:15 p.m. — ladder demonstration.

• 4 p.m. — doors close.

Other activities include movies, refreshments, Sparky the Fire Dog, helium balloons, antique fire trucks, fire clowns and blood pressure checks.

Smoke detectors are available free to Farmington Hills residents. Call the city's Community Development office: 474-6115, Ext. 233.

ALSO AS part of National Fire Prevention Week, families are asked to develop a home fire evacuation plan and practice it in preparation for a statewide home family fire drill at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 8 (see related story).

Farmington Hills firefighter Michael Garr is teaching fire safety education to several elementary school classes in conjunction with the special week.

Both the Farmington Hills Fire Department and the Farmington Department of Public Safety give tours of their fire stations. To arrange a tour, call the Fire Prevention Division at Farmington Hills, 553-0744, or Commander Michael Wiggins at Farmington, 474-5500.

Weather kicks up

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But no one was hurt. For that, the Cruses, who moved to Farmington Hills from Buffalo in July, were thankful. "It was incredible, unbelievable. We had no idea what was going on," Cheri said.

The nightmare experience started about 7 p.m. Friday. "We had just finished dinner when the tornado siren went off," said Rick, a financial analyst for General Motors Corp.

The Cruses quickly rounded up their daughters, Nicole, 7, and Charlene, 5, and their wire-haired terrier, Willie, and headed to the basement. When the weather improved, they went upstairs. "We saw the neighbors' lights on, so we thought everything was OK," Rick said.

But while the family was talking to Rick's mother in Buffalo, the weather worsened. "I went upstairs to close the windows and looked outside. It looked really bad, but I saw nothing coming our way," Rick said.

AFTER CLOSING the back windows, Rick tried to close the front door. "That's when the wind got real violent."

So Rick hollered upstairs. "My bed shook it was so bad. I remember even feeling like the house moved," Cheri said.

As the family again moved toward the basement, they heard the rear window shatter. Soon, they lost power and heard a second tornado siren.

It was also about this time that the tree in their yard "lifted straight up and everything came

off, according to what neighbors told us," Cheri said.

By 8:30 p.m., the worst was over.

"We're used to snow, not tornadoes," Cheri said. "I remember days back in Buffalo, we couldn't get out of our house because of the snow. That was fun. This wasn't."

Nicole and Charlene were scared, but the family dog was a week during the real life drama. Says Cheri: "He wouldn't lay down or sit. He just paced and paced. He knew something was going on."

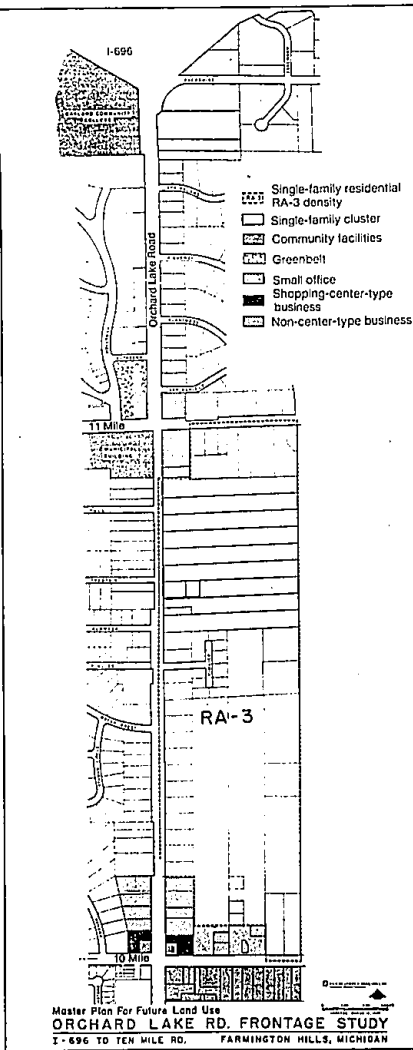
AMAZINGLY, THE house next to the one that was lifted from its foundation escaped damage. Bev and Bill Hines and their sons, Scott, 8, and Chad, 6, moved to Farmington Hills from Castle Rock, Colo., in July. Bill is a vehicle distribution manager for American Motors Corp.

No stranger to twisters, Bev is sure what raced through their neighborhood Friday night was the tail of a tornado. "I've seen — back in Illinois where I'm from — a tornado take straw and drive it through a telephone pole."

When they heard what sounded like a train coming, the family retreated to the basement. While there, Bev said she heard what sounded like a tree going down. "It was a cracking and crumbling sound."

When they discovered what they actually heard about 15 minutes later — the house next door collapsing — "it made me sick," Bev said.

THE OWNERS of the house lifted from its foundation hoped to move in Dec. 1.



The RA-3 master plan zoned on Orchard Lake Road is a 6.6 acre spot for some Farmington Hills City Council members and residents. A residential, higher density zone, RA-3 allows developers to build up to a maximum density of 2.8 single-family units per acre and 4.8 cluster units per acre. Some lots on the east side of the thoroughfare already have been designated for cluster housing.

Hills zoning to continue intact

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The special meeting was scheduled to review the Farmington Hills Planning Commission's earlier decision to change the master plan zoning designation along a portion of Orchard Lake — on the east side, just north of 10 Mile up to I-696 — from the most restrictive residential zoning, RA-1, to RA-3.

RA-1 allows a maximum density of 1.8 single-family units per acre and 3.1 cluster units. RA-3 allows a maximum density of 2.8 single-family units per acre and 4.8 cluster units.

"IF WE CAN'T agree on it, we'll have to live with their (planning commission's) decision," Councilwoman Jan Dolan said as the meeting was adjourned.

Philip Arnold defended the commission's decision to master zone RA-3 as a "middle of the road position," after determining that other single-family zones were less desirable.

Residents — primarily members of the Springbrook Homeowners Association — who oppose the RA-3 zoning, left council chambers disappointed. The subdivision is east of Orchard Lake Road behind property that is master zoned as RA-3.

"I am very disappointed about the final outcome," Springbrook Homeowners Association President Lois Johnson said. "They seem definitely to be at an impasse."

Subdivision residents are opposed to RA-3 because of the higher density. With the building density allowed per acre developers will be forced to tear down much, if not all, of the trees and foliage to take greatest advantage of the property, said Jack Joyn, Springbrook association member.

Residents are concerned that with increased density, the value of their single-family houses will decrease and drainage problems in the area will increase, Joyn said.

Another concern of residents, Joyn said, is that developers have enough trouble trying to fit 14 cluster houses, for example, on a lot zoned RA-1. With the RA-3 zone, a developer could build 22 units.

"We'll lose everything we have from an atmosphere standpoint," Joyn said. "The subdivision would like to see it stay in a reasonably residential situation, maintaining an atmosphere that is Farmington Hills."

THE PLANNING commission's change in the master plan from RA-1 along Orchard Lake to RA-3 was the result of a council request to review master zoning along the thoroughfare. The master plan is a guideline for development and does not necessarily reflect current zoning.

Council's request stemmed from several factors, including city officials' concern about land use along the stretch. Developers have maintained that construction of single-family houses is inappropriate because of the characteristically long, narrow lots fronting Orchard Lake.

According to Alkateeb though, part of the intent of the zoning review was to determine whether it would be possible to master zone the area to provide developers with an incentive to combine the narrow lots for development.

Planning commissioners concluded that residential uses should be maintained along Orchard Lake Road. Because of non-conforming uses along the thoroughfare's frontage — the Oakland Hills Mobile Home Park, for example — as well as the characteristically long, narrow lots, the RA-3 zone was chosen for the master plan.

Despite Alkateeb's original intentions for the zoning review, he admitted Monday that it appears increased density goes hand-in-hand with combining lots. He did council that "in reality RA-3 didn't do anything but increase the density."

MUCH OF THE debate over the RA-3 zone stems from the density of cluster development that is allowed along Orchard Lake Road. Cluster housing is an option available in single-family residential districts. Properties fronting Orchard Lake Road, from Springfield north to I-696, already qualify for cluster housing, Farmington Hills Planner Ed Gardiner said.

The differences in density between the residential districts (RA-1, 2, and 3) provided enough ammunition Monday to prevent the council from offering planning commissioners a majority opinion on what zoning district they wanted.

Only Councilman Ben Marks supported the RA-3 zone. "I don't think we have done anyone any service by rejecting the plan that the planning commission has so aptly put forth," he said.

Alkateeb and councilmen Terry Sever and Donn Wolf supported changing the master plan back to the most restrictive single-family zone, RA-1.

Yet other council members opposed the RA-1 zone, maintaining that under such restrictive zoning, development was not economically worthwhile on the thoroughfare's long and narrow parcels.

Before the final vote, however, Dolan suggested that the council planning commissioners work with residents in the Orchard Lake Road area to develop zoning that would bring about the type of development and building density wanted.

Enrollment jumps

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AT THE elementary level, enrollment increased by 302 students, 44 more than officials projected. At Longacre and Wood Creek, two schools where controversial boundary changes were made to alleviate overcrowding during the past year, both have already reached or exceeded their Fourth Friday counts from last year, Nutter said.

"If we had not moved those students, we'd really be in trouble," he said.

Elementary students from Section 3C and 3D, bounded by 13 Mile and 14 Mile and Orchard Lake Road and Farmington Road, will move from Wood Creek to Eagle next fall as part of boundary changes approved last spring.

At the senior high school level, where officials predicted a decline of 174 students from last Fourth Friday count, 90 more than expected graced the halls of Farmington, Harrison and North Farmington high schools in early September.

Nutter is viewing the student-in-

creasing "extremely carefully." During elementary boundary discussions last year, the idea of building a new school on the west side of the district was raised.

Nutter estimates such a building could cost the district upwards of \$12 million, and that it might not be the answer.

"We have to be very careful in discussing construction of a new school," he said. "We have facilities that might be usable now."

Projecting student enrollment figures is a year-long process that begins at the start of each school year, said Nutter who recently formed a boundary study committee. This year's committee is looking at the high schools — specifically at those for North Farmington where the district has an overcrowding problem.

The district uses local building information, statistics and trends from past years, and an analysis done at Michigan State University to help predict student numbers for the coming year.