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Derrick J.V. Sawyer
Fire Commissioner

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Grilling Safety Tips from the Fire Commissioner

Philadelphia, PA: As the summer grilling season unofficially comes to a close today, Fire Commissioner Derrick J.V. Sawyer advises all citizens to be aware of the dangers associated with barbecue grills. Barbecue grills are regulated by the Philadelphia Fire Code and the purpose of the regulations is to ensure the safe use of grills.

Charcoal Burning Grills

Except when used at a one-or two-family dwelling, use of charcoal grills is not permitted on combustible balconies, decks or roofs or within 10 feet of combustible construction (such as the wall of a house with wood or vinyl siding).

Propane (liquefied petroleum gas) Fueled Grills

Except when used at a one-or two-family dwelling, propane fueled barbecue grills are not permitted on any balconies, decks or roofs, or within 10 feet of combustible construction (such as the wall of a house with wood or vinyl siding). When propane barbecue grills are in use, propane tanks are required to be at least five feet from any building openings at or below the level of a tank. Propane gas is heavier than air and a leak may seep in a building to a source of ignition.

All propane cylinders up to 40 pounds gas capacity (includes barbecue tank size) must have a shut off device inside the cylinder to prevent overfilling. The new approved type cylinders can be distinguished from the older illegal ones by the shape of the handwheel on top of the cylinder (the on/off valve). New cylinders have a triangular handwheel. Older, non-compliant cylinders have a star-shaped or round handwheel.

Barbecue Grill Fire Safety:

1. When using a propane fueled barbecue grill, follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Make a thorough inspection of the grill prior to using it. Gas connections should be checked for leaks by applying a soapy water solution; bubbles will form if gas is escaping. Damaged or corroded gas tanks should be replaced and not used.

Fire Commissioner Sawyer wishes to remind all that Fire is Everyone’s Fight™

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2. When a liquid fire starter is used to light charcoal, only charcoal lighter fluids should be used – gasoline, kerosene or any other flammable or combustible liquid should not be used. Lighter fluid should only be used before lighting the charcoal and never while it is burning.
3. Barbecue grills should never be left unattended. Small children and pets should be kept away from the cooking area.
4. When a propane barbecue grill is not in use, shut the gas off at the tank and store it in an outdoor location away from where children play, not in direct sunlight, and at least 5 feet from any building openings at or below the level of the propane tank.
5. When transporting a propane tank in a vehicle, such as for refueling, the tank should be placed in an upright position, secured against movement, and not left unattended. In hot weather a tank should be transported in a ventilated area of a vehicle.

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