

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Fire fatalities down dramatically

In 1971, the year I joined the staff of The Pottstown Mercury, there were four fatal fires in Pottstown, including the deaths of three small children.

The next year, three people died in Pottstown fires.

Fatal fires were not uncommon in those days, but they are now.

Since 1979, fire fatalities nationally have dropped by two-thirds, from 35 deaths per million people in 1979 to 12 deaths per million in 2007.

Pottstown Fire Department statistics only go back to 2017 because of a change in record-keeping software, unfortunately. There have been no fatalities in that time.

Smoke detectors

The main reason for the drop in deaths is the advent of a cheap technology — the battery-operated smoke detector.

The vast majority of fire deaths (78 % in 2017) occur in residential properties, with the majority of those in one- and two-family homes. Vehicle fires (15%) are the second leading cause of fatalities. Only 3 percent of fire deaths occur in non-residential commercial and public properties.

Battery-operated smoke detectors became available in the 1970s. As their price dropped they started to become widely used in homes by the mid 1980s.

Today both smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors are required by codes in Pottstown and are

checked at all inspections.

My wife and I have both battery-operated and hard-wired detectors in our house connected to a central alarm station.

Some years ago we were watching television on the second floor of our house when we heard sirens out front and someone pounding on our door.

Our furnace had back-fired and set off the smoke detector in the basement.

The fire department knew about it before we did!

Outstanding response time

The Pottstown Fire Department has an outstanding response time. It has four manned trucks 24/7 that typically arrive at any borough fire within four minutes. That's much faster than the state average.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Statewide average fire response time

Rural	14 minutes
Suburban	10 minutes
Urban	9 minutes
Pottstown	4 minutes

Free smoke detectors

The Pottstown Fire Department will give any Pottstown resident a free smoke detector. You can pick one up at any borough fire station, and they also are carried on all Pottstown fire trucks for distribution.



POTTSTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT responds to a report of smoke on the third floor of a downtown Pottstown building. Firemen discovered an active fire in a third floor bathroom and put it out quickly. Damage was contained to the bathroom.