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Snapshot Size-Up #127

Fires in Sheds and Out Buildings

Fires that occur in sheds or similar types of out buildings pose a variety of threats to firefighters. Mostly, it is the uncertainty of what is stored inside these structures. Ask a homeowner what's inside their shed, and you may hear, "some gasoline for the lawnmower and a few gardening tools".

They may have forgotten about an old propane cylinder or the pool chemicals.



Photo: Pembroke Fire Company

To enhance your awareness when responding to these types of fires, here are some tips to consider.

- The homeowner may be complacent or simply unaware of certain contents that a firefighter would deem dangerous. As firefighters, we always need to ask the right questions and sometimes prompt the homeowner with questions like, "I see you have a pool. Do you have shock or chlorine stored inside that shed?"
- Many residential sheds will have a lawn mower and similar motor driven tools. Be aware of this equipment and the items that are associated with them – gasoline, oil, and/or other fuels.
- Be aware of chemical hazards such as pool chemicals such as chlorine; pesticides; bleach and cleaning chemicals; paints and thinners; and oils and grease type products.
- Consider the storage of a "back-up" propane cylinder or a forgotten empty cylinder.
- The structure itself likely will not meet any codes or standards. The structure may quickly collapse or fail when compromised by fire.
- The shed may have live electrical service inside. Secure power at the breaker and use caution.

Shed and out building fires should not be taken lightly. Remember to protect your exposures and consider that many times there is little reward for risking an aggressive fire attack. The unprotected building will usually be a loss before firefighters apply the first drop of water.

Stay Safe!



Chief Donald Colarusso is a twenty five year fire service veteran. He is also the President of All Hands Fire Equipment and a Level-II Fire Instructor in New Jersey. Don has been a fire instructor for more than 15-years and is one of only a few instructors in the United States who is authorized to teach on all of the leading Firefighter Escape Systems. For additional information or to contact Chief Colarusso, please visit www.AllHandsFire.com

