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New Fire-Safe Cigarettes coming to Texas

Soon, all cigarettes sold in Texas will be certified fire standard compliant, or “fire-safe.” The new cigarettes will contain strips of less porous paper that will slow down the burning of the cigarette, causing it to self-extinguish.

The State Fire Marshal’s Office, which is a part of the Texas Department of Insurance, will be responsible for all fire-safe cigarette certifications, inspections and enforcement in Texas. State Fire Marshal Paul Maldonado said the sooner the new cigarettes are on the Texas market, the better.

“The State Fire Marshal’s Office is committed to reducing the loss of life and property due to fire and other related hazards,” said State Fire Marshal Paul Maldonado. “Fire-safe cigarettes will aid in the prevention of house fires and wild fires and that will reduce the loss of life and property in Texas.”

Smoking is the leading cause of house fire deaths in the United States. In Texas, cigarettes caused approximately 500 residential fires resulting in ten deaths and \$14 million in property losses in 2006. The Texas Forest Service said wildfires started by smokers charred almost 50,000 acres of land in 2006.

Fire-safe cigarettes are designed to self-extinguish if they are left unattended or not actively being smoked. Cigarette manufacturers are able to produce fire-safe cigarettes by wrapping the cigarettes with two or three bands of less porous paper.

While the new cigarettes will begin hitting the Texas market January 1, 2009, actual enforcement of the fire-safe cigarette law will begin on January 1, 2010, allowing retailers time to dispose of their existing inventory of cigarettes. Texas is among 22 states that have passed fire-safe cigarette legislation.

The bill’s author, Rep. Phil King of Weatherford, said he got the idea for the legislation from fire fighters. “My local fire marshal contacted me about the fire safe cigarette idea before last session and told me about how many lives it had saved in other states. I started doing a little research on it and quickly realized that there were no added costs and it was easy to implement. I began wondering why we didn’t already have this law in place. It’s my hope that HB 2935 will greatly curtail the problem of home fires in Texas,” King said.

A spokesman for the Insurance Council of Texas (ICT) says removing a major cause of residential fires is a huge step.

“Too often we hear of careless smokers losing their life and the lives of others in house fires that started with a cigarette,” said Mark Hanna, a spokesman for the Insurance Council of Texas. “If we can eliminate all residential fires caused by a cigarette, we could reduce the number of fatalities by six percent and property losses by three percent, which in Texas, is a lot of people and a lot of property.”

The Insurance Council of Texas works closely with the State Fire Marshal’s Office in various fire prevention programs. The group’s *We’re Out to Alarm Texas* campaign has placed thousands of smoke alarms into the homes of low income and elderly homeowners across the state. To date, the smoke alarms have saved the lives of three people.

The Insurance Council of Texas is the largest state insurance trade association in the country consisting of more than 500 property and casualty insurers writing business in Texas. For more information turn to ICT’s Web site at www.insurancecouncil.org.

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