



CITY OF HARRISONBURG
FIRE
DEPARTMENT

101 NORTH MAIN STREET
HARRISONBURG, VA 22802
OFFICE (540) 432-7703

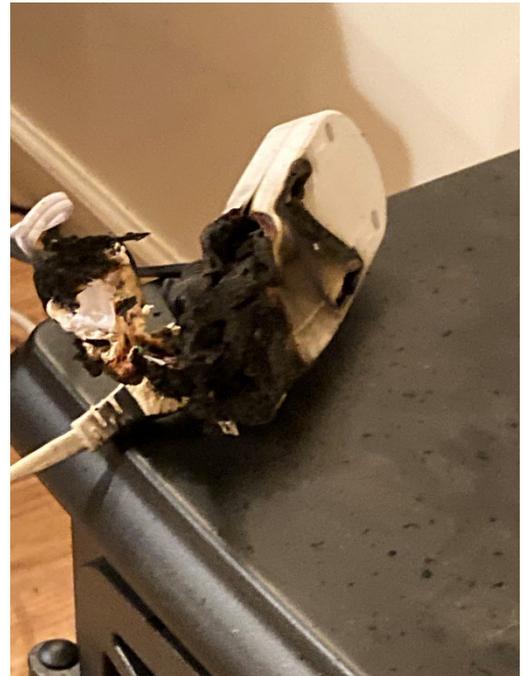
For Immediate Release:
April 16, 2022

Contact: Matthew Tobia, Fire Chief
540-432-7703

Functioning Smoke Alarms Awaken Family

HARRISONBURG, Va. – A city family, awakened by functioning smoke alarms, were able to safely escape from a residential structure fire overnight. Just after midnight, Harrisonburg firefighters were called to the 400 block of Green St. and found smoke in the basement of a residence. Upon investigation, firefighters were able to quickly identify an overloaded power strip in the basement that had failed and caught fire, igniting nearby furniture. The family of four, including two adults and two young adult children, were able to re-occupy the home after firefighters confirmed no extension of fire and removed smoke from the home. There were no injuries to civilians or responders, and the HFD was assisted by RCFR and the HRS.

“This is both a success story and a cautionary tale,” said Fire Chief Matthew Tobia. “Functioning smoke alarms alerted the sleeping family and allowed them time to escape. The overloaded surge suppressor that caused the fire is an all-too-common occurrence.”



According to the National Fire Protection Association, an estimated 46,500 residential building electrical fires are reported annually. These fires caused an estimated average of 390 civilian deaths and 1,330 civilian injuries each year in 2015–2019, as well as an estimated \$1.5 billion in direct property damage a year. One of the leading causes of electrical fires are overloaded power strips and surge protectors. First, there is a difference between the two: power strips are nothing more than extension cords with multiple plugs. Although surge suppressors contain a circuit breaker designed to reduce the chance of a sudden “surge” in electricity reaching vulnerable devices (computers, etc) they do not prevent a fire when overloaded. Devices plugged into a surge suppressor can draw or demand more power than the suppressor is rated for, increasing heat within the suppressor. As heat builds, a fire can ignite, and nearby combustibles including carpet, furniture, and bed or window linens can also catch fire, leading to rapid extension.

The HFD strongly encourages city residents to check their extension cords, power strips, and surge suppressors to ensure that they are not overloaded. The presence of 4 to 8 plugs in a strip does not mean it is safe to use all of the plugs simultaneously. Any resident needing assistance in evaluating their home for risks of fire can contact the HFD during normal business hours or stop by any city fire station. The HFD also provides and installs free smoke and carbon monoxide alarms for any city resident who needs them.

To learn more about fire safety, go to: <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Teaching-tools/Safety-tip-sheets> .

The Harrisonburg Fire Department is an ISO-Class II All-Hazards agency providing essential emergency and non-emergency life safety services to the public who live, work and travel in Harrisonburg. More information about the Fire Department is available on-line at www.harrisonburgva.gov/fire or on Facebook[®], Twitter[®] and Instagram[®].

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to almost 55,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



###