

Fact Sheet

Grilling on Apartment Balconies

- Washington State's Legislature approved adoption of the International Fire Code last year after a recommendation from the State Building Code Council. The council provides independent analysis and advice to the Legislature and the governor on state building code issues. The changes come from a new 600-page International Building Code, which merges the country's three regional building codes. This new code takes effect July 1, 2004.
- The International Fire Code section 308.3.1 specifically states:

“Charcoal burners and other open-flame cooking devices shall not be operated on combustible balconies or within 10 feet of combustible construction. Exceptions include one and two-family dwellings and buildings, balconies and decks that are protection by an automatic sprinkler system.”

“308.3.1.1 Liquefied-petroleum-gas-fueled cooking devices. LP-gas burners having an LP-gas container with a water capacity greater than 2.5 pounds (nominal 1 pound (0.454kg) LP-gas capacity) shall not be located on combustible balconies or within 10 feet (3048 mm) of combustible construction.” Exceptions include one- and two-family dwellings.
- Beginning July 1, new building codes prohibit the use of open-flame LP-gas (greater than 1 pounds) or charcoal barbecues on combustible balconies unless there is a sprinkler overhead.
- The rules apply to existing and new construction of multifamily residential buildings, which are defined as three or more attached units.
- The rule does not apply to noncombustible construction such as concrete.
- RCW 19.27 prevents local agencies from lessening model code requirements (when adopted by SBCC).
- In Washington state there were 5 fires caused by grills in multi-residential buildings reported from 2001 through 2003 causing \$3,750 in property damage.
- Use of a gas or charcoal grill on an apartment balcony can put an entire building at risk of a fire.
 - Hot charcoals or open flames can start a fire if in contact with combustible materials.
 - Wet charcoal can spontaneously combust.
 - Burning charcoal can introduce high level of carbon monoxide.
 - Leaking gas from cylinders that are improperly maintained or not properly turned off can be ignited by a heat source and cause an explosion and/or fire.
- If grilling on a combustible apartment balcony, use an electric grill.
 - Keep children away from grilling area.
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Use grilling tools that give the chef plenty of clearance form heat.
 - Don't leave cooking unattended.
 - Allow the grill to cool before moving it.
- Remember these fire safety practices:

- Know your building's fire protection system. - Be familiar with the type of fire protection system in your building. Know the location of smoke alarms and whether your building is protected by fire sprinklers.
 - Smoke Alarms – You are responsible for maintenance and testing of your smoke alarms and replacing batteries. Check them monthly by pushing the test button and listening for the alarm.
 - Develop and practice a home escape plan - Know two ways out of every room and your escape route out of the building. Practice your escape plan with your neighbors.
- In Case of Fire – Know what to do.
 - Don't rush out into the hallway. Feel the door. If it is hot, use another way out. If the door is cool, leave by the nearest exit.
 - If your building has a public announcement system, listen carefully and follow directions.
 - Never use elevators in a fire. Use the stairs. Close all doors behind you to slow fire spread.
 - Get out and stay out. Go directly to your planned meeting place and stay there. If you think someone is trapped inside, notify the fire department.
 - If you can't escape from your apartment, stuff wet towels, sheets or clothes around the door and vents to keep smoke out. Call the fire department and tell them where you are. If no smoke is coming into the room you're in, open a window slightly both at the top and at the bottom. Stay low and wave a bright cloth, towel or sheet out the window to signal your location.

References: Washington Building Code Council, International Fire Code, National Fire Incident Reporting for Washington State

