

## **Fire Prevention**

Today begins the observance of a week that is important to every aspect of society, but particularly so for those of us in Life Care and Century Park. This is Fire Prevention Week, which has been sponsored by the National Fire Protection Association since 1922. It is the longest-running public health and safety observance on record. President Woodrow Wilson declared the first National Fire Prevention Day in 1920. Two years later, it was changed to the week in which October 9 falls.

Fire Prevention Week was established in commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, which began on October 8 but did most of its damage on October 9. The fire killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed about 17,400 buildings, and burned more than 2,000 acres. Recent research has confirmed that the fire began in the O'Leary barn, but the exact cause remains unknown, even though the popular legend of a cow starting the fire by kicking over a lantern persists.

Can anything be more dreaded, with such potential for harm, than an unchecked fire in a health-care facility – particularly one housing frail and infirm residents with challenged mobility? Acting with concern and a paramount commitment to safety, Life Care Centers of America entered into a contract with Russell Phillips and Associates in 1991 to carefully inspect all of our buildings and to make recommendations to assure that they meet fire safety standards. In addition, the company provides training for associates – including a practical demonstration of extinguishing a real fire in the lap of one of the trainers. Initially, the inspection and follow-up training were completed every other year, but that was changed to make it an annual review.

Since 1991, a few fires have occurred, mostly in laundry rooms, with no loss of life or significant injury, and any building damage has not been widespread. In each instance, the preparation of the staff to meet the emergency has been cited as the reason that a possible tragedy was avoided. Even so, we must be ever vigilant, focused on the training and ready to act if a fire should occur.

Let us keep our good record intact. But more importantly, let's be absolutely certain our residents remain safe.

--Beecher Hunter