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Press Release
Recent Incidents Involving Motorhomes

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Missoula Rural Fire District (MRFD) has experienced a recent surge of responses for fires involving motorhomes and recreational vehicles (RV's). Since October 26, 2018, MRFD has responded to four (4) motorhome/RV fires. All four fires have resulted in significant property damage, and three of those fires resulted in minor injuries to occupants. While motorhomes and RV's are normally associated with the summer months, more and more people are using motorhomes year-round. Some people are using them as temporary and even permanent housing.

Motorhomes present unique safety concerns for occupants since they are both a vehicle and a structure. Due to the limited space in the living area and lightweight interior finishes, fires tend to spread rapidly. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), there are over 20,000 motorhome and recreational vehicle fires annually. The most common place for a fire to start in a motorhome is the cooking area, and the second most common location is the engine compartment. When people are living or staying in a motorhome, they should treat it as if it were any other structure. In light of these recent incidents, MRFD would like to offer these important safety tips.

- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Never leave appliances that are plugged in and on unattended.
- Turn off overhead exhaust fans when you leave the vehicle.
- Don't leave 12-volt lights on. Keep clothing and other burnable things away from them (like in storage spaces). They get very hot.
- If the flame on your galley stove goes out while in use, unless you have run out of fuel, the gas will continue to flow and could result in an explosion. Turn off the stove and air out the space before trying to relight.
- Keep all combustibles--from paper towels to curtains--far enough away from your stove so that they cannot catch fire.
- Gasoline and propane can pose an immediate, explosive danger. Deal at once with any leaks or spills and use all fuels in areas that are vented adequately. Operate your generator in an area where gasoline fumes cannot reach an ignition source.

- RVs often have a very limited number of electrical outlets, and sometimes occupants use power strips to plug in more things. Don't overload the electrical outlets! Circuit breakers don't always prevent overloads from starting fires!
- It's best to never to use an extension cord in an RV. If you must, make sure you use a heavy-duty extension cord, and make sure the load you put on it is well within its safe load capacity. Don't run any electrical cord under a carpet or floor mat.
- Have your RV's brakes checked. A dragging brake can create enough friction to ignite a tire or brake fluid.
- Bouncing down the road can loosen electrical connections, which can produce heat, and in turn, fire. Make sure all electrical connections are tight.
- Check all 12-volt connections. Many RV fires are caused by a 12-volt short.
- Leaking fluids in the engine compartment can ignite. Check all hoses for firmness, clamp tightness, and signs of leaking. Have repairs made if needed.
- Have working smoke detectors that are properly located.
- Have working fire extinguishers in the right places and know how to use them.
- Be able to get out of your RV from any location quickly. Know how to use the emergency exit windows and make sure they are accessible!

If a fire starts: don't hesitate to evacuate the vehicle, get everyone out, and stay a safe distance away. Never re-enter any burning structure to retrieve anything, once you are out stay out! Get help. All adults and older children should know how to dial 911. Remember that cell service may be limited where you are, so plan ahead of time. Always know your exact location so firefighters can find you.

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For more information regarding the recent incidents or for more information on Fire safety in motorhomes and RV's, please contact MRFD at 406-549-6172.