

RELIGIOUS AND FUNERAL PROPERTIES

Religious and funeral properties include churches, temples, mosques, religious education facilities, funeral parlors and related properties

Executive Summary

During the five-year period of 2004-2008, NFPA estimates that U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 1,890 structure fires in religious and funeral properties per year. These fires caused an annual average of one civilian death, 12 civilian fire injuries, and \$102 million in direct property damage. The vast majority of the fires in this category were in religious properties. Only 4% were in funeral parlors. Reported fires in this occupancy group fell 48% from 3,500 in 1980 to 1,810 in 2010.

Religious properties are used for a variety of purposes besides worship. Building halls may host meals, parties or community meetings. Classroom space may be used for religious education. Most have office space and kitchen facilities.

Sunday is the peak day for fires in these properties. Saturday ranked second. The peak times of day for these fires were 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m. to noon. Only 15% of the fires occurred between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. but these fires accounted for 42% of the direct property damage.

Cooking equipment was involved in 28% of the fires in religious and funeral properties. However, only 3% of the direct property damage resulted from cooking fires. Heating equipment was involved in 17% of the fires resulting in 21% of the direct property damage. The 15% of fires that were intentionally set caused 26% of the direct property damage. Electrical distribution and lighting equipment caused 9% of the fires and 12% of the property damage. Candles caused 4% of the fires and 8% of the property loss. Lightning caused 4% of the fires and 12% of the property damage.

Twenty-three percent of the fires in religious and funeral properties began in the kitchen or cooking area; these fires caused 4% of the direct property damage. Seven percent of the fires began in the heating equipment room or area. The 4% of fires that started in the attic, ceiling/roof assembly or related concealed space caused 11% of the direct property damage.

Three-quarters of the fires were confined to the room of origin.

Automatic suppression systems were present in only 14% of these fires in 2004-2008. Almost all of these were sprinklers. When wet pipe sprinklers were present in the fire area, the average loss per fire was 67% lower than when no automatic suppression systems were present. Properties under construction were excluded from these calculations.

Some type of fire detection equipment was present and operated in 47% of the reported fires in these properties. The equipment was present but failed to operate in 4% of the fires. In 8%, the fire was too small to activate the detection equipment. Forty percent of these fires occurred in properties with no fire detection equipment at all.

