

STORES AND OTHER MERCANTILE PROPERTIES

Overview of the fire problem in stores and other mercantile properties, including trend tables, causes, time of day, day of week, month of year and area of origin. Also includes previously published incident descriptions.

Executive Summary

During the five-year period of 2004-2008, NFPA estimates that U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 16,360 structure fires in stores and other mercantile properties per year. These fires caused an annual average of 13 civilian deaths, 242 civilian fire injuries, and \$648 million in direct property damage. Reported fires in this occupancy group fell 57% from 37,500 in 1980 to 16,200 in 2008.

Stores and other mercantile properties include an assortment of different types of stores, facilities providing personal services such as barber and beauty shops, laundry or dry cleaning shops, service stations, vehicle or other repair shops and businesses selling professional supplies or services, retail stores, and recreational, hobby, home repair sales, or pet stores. Grocery stores or other stores selling food or beverages accounted for more than one in every four (27%) of these fires.

Fires that occurred during off-business hours caused considerably more damage per fire on average than those fires that occurred during the day. Fires that occurred between 9:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. caused an average of \$75,000 of property damage each, while those occurring between 5:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. caused an average of \$29,000 of property loss each.

Cooking equipment was involved in 19% of the fires in stores and other mercantile properties. However, only 6% of the direct property damage resulted from cooking fires. Electrical distribution and lighting equipment was involved in 12% of the fires and 19% of property damage. The 10% of fires that were intentional caused 16% of the property damage. Heating equipment was involved in 11% of the fires and 9% of the property damage. Smoking materials started 9% and clothes dryer or washers were involved in 9% of the ignitions.

Sixteen percent of the fires in stores and other mercantile properties began in the kitchen or cooking area; these fires caused 4% of the direct property damage. Five percent of the fires began in the laundry room or area (likely due to the fact that laundries and dry cleaning businesses are included in this group of occupancies). No other area of origin accounted for more than 4% of all fires.

Three-quarters (77%) of the fires were confined to the room of origin.

Individuals interested in keeping stores and other mercantile properties safe should consult [NFPA 101, Life Safety Code®](#) for information about reducing fires and associated losses.

Leading Causes of Structure Fires in Stores and Other Mercantile Properties, 2004-2008

