

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Fire Prevention Week

Driving along the streets of Longmeadow and nearby towns over the past week, it is wonderful to see the trees becoming more colorful each day. “October’s bright blue weather,” chronicled by 19th century poet Helen Hunt Jackson, is in full display. Yes, each autumn October heralds the changing season, and every year it begins with another tradition from the America of long ago. That tradition is the topic of this week’s Byline: the return of Fire Prevention Week.

I first heard of Fire Prevention Week the same way most of us did. Firemen came to the elementary school during that first week of October to teach basic safety precautions. In the ‘50s we learned the danger of inserting pennies in a fuse box, a fire hazard from another era. I had never heard of doing that (and my parents assured me they would not try such a risky endeavor), but it must have made a strong impression since I still remember the warning today.

Times have changed, and these days the instructions are more specific than ever. This week’s byline is a refresher course for those of us who do not have children in school to carry home safety messages they receive this week. They may sound elementary and unnecessary, just as wearing a seatbelt while driving may seem unnecessary. If you have never had an accident (fire), you have not needed the protection. But it’s best to prepare because you never know when an accident – or a fire – will occur.

The first lesson: check your smoke alarms. This front line device for household fire safety is a basic item in any home. The only problem with smoke detectors is that they don’t function unless their batteries work. Replacing them this month will both ensure that they work and protect you from any automatic “low battery” beep in the middle of the night during the coming year.

Second lesson: practice candle safety. Candlelight is a beautiful addition to a winter gathering, and aromatic candles have become an integral part of many households. As their use has increased, however, fires have increased as well. Candle-caused fires have tripled in the past ten years.

Instead of getting rid of your candles, you can reduce their risk by following these safety tips: Place a candle on a saucer or candleholder and extinguish it after use. Do not leave it unattended. Keep it out of reach of pets and children. And keep it at least one foot away from flammable items. Following these safety tips, illustrated by the Candle Circle of Safety logo, will give your home the warmth of candle glow without the danger of fire.

Third lesson: keep lighters and matches away from children and dispose of smoking materials safely. These are familiar warnings, but forgetting them can lead to fires. Lighters can be a deadly plaything, and a smoldering cigarette can ignite a serious fire.

That’s it for this year’s fire prevention lecture. If you take just a few minutes to check the safety tips, you can make your home is well-protected for another year.