



Media Release

\$7m in damages prompts shed fire safety warning

20 October 2022

Shed and garage fires have cost South Australian householders close to \$7 million in damages over the 2021-2022 financial year, prompting a safety warning from the state's fire service's.

Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) and SA Country Fire Service (CFS) firefighters have battled over 350 shed and garage fires across the state with a collective damage bill of over \$19 million, over the past three financial years (2021-2022 inclusive).

MFS Community Engagement Officer, Daniel Humeniuk said sheds and garages often contain a mixture of dangerous items that could lead to fires and he urges the community to do some spring cleaning to avoid an emergency situation.

"Sheds and garages are often stocked with LPG cylinders, rechargeable batteries on charge, paint thinners, solvents, fuel, butane cans, and pool and cleaning chemicals. Sparks and electrical faults can easily ignite these items leading to a fire that can rapidly spread if other items are in close proximity.

"As the weather warms up, now is a good time to check your sheds and garages to ensure any flammable liquids are stored in suitable containers and are placed in a well-ventilated area, clear of electrical equipment and other potential heat and ignition sources," said MFS Community Engagement Officer, Humeniuk.

Ray Jackson, CFS State Duty Commander said sheds are an important structure for those living in rural areas so it's important the products and materials kept within them are maintained.

"Farmers and people with large properties will often use their sheds as a storage space for vehicles and vital farming equipment. Therefore, if a fire does impact the structure, it can have a catastrophic effect on their livelihoods.

"We ask that all South Australians, particularly those in bushfire risk areas, take simple steps to clean up in and around their sheds to ensure that their assets are protected year-round," said Ray Jackson, CFS State Duty Commander.

MFS Community Engagement Officer, Daniel Humeniuk warns that some items, such as oil-based paints and some timber stains and polishes, also run the risk of spontaneous combustion if not stored or disposed of correctly.

"Spontaneous combustion occurs due to a chemical reaction between a combustible material, such as drying oils, and oxygen in the air. This chemical reaction causes a build-up of heat which can reach ignition point if the material is bunched up or in a pile preventing the heat from releasing.

“If you are using rags with linseed oil or other drying materials they should be soaked in water and spread out flat in a safe place to dry, immediately after use,” said MFS Community Engagement Officer, Daniel Humeniuk.

The possibility of spontaneous combustion is greater if the surrounding air is warm and dry, conditions we often see in the South Australian Spring and Summer.

Financial year	Number of fires	\$ Damages (approx.)
2021 – 2022	117	6.7m
2020 - 2021	122	8m
2019 - 2020	117	4.6m

The MFS reminds the public of the following key safety tips for sheds and garages:

- Do not refuel lawn mowers and other tools when they are hot, turned on or the engine is running.
- The refuelling of lawn mowers, or use of turpentine and other petroleum-based solvents, should only occur in well ventilated areas to avoid the accumulation of explosive vapours.
- Use a directional funnel to prevent fuel spills and clean up spills immediately. Do not overfill containers or tanks.
- Do not leave re-chargeable batteries charging for extended periods of time.
- Ensure any work you conduct that might cause sparks is well clear of any combustibles.
- Ensure all electrical wiring and associated equipment is checked and compliant.
- Rags that have been used with petrol, methylated spirits, turpentine, white spirit, acetone, solvent based glues or petroleum-based paint thinners should be dried in a well ventilated area (to remove the volatile gases) before disposal.
- Chemicals used for chlorinating swimming pools may react with other stored chemicals that could result in a fire starting. Ensure these chemicals are stored appropriately and away from fuels, oils and detergents.
- NEVER tamper with LPG or other gas cylinders. If you're unsure of the age, condition or contents of a cylinder, discontinue using them and replace them with a new cylinder in good condition.

The MFS provides comprehensive home fire safety tips on [hazardous materials](#), [barbeques](#), [electrical hazards](#), and [self-heating and spontaneous combustion](#) at www.mfs.sa.gov.au

A press conference will be held today (Thursday, 20 October 2022) at ADELAIDE FIRE STATION, 99 Wakefield Street Adelaide, at 11:30am.

For media enquiries please telephone the MFS Media Line on (08) 8204 3770