

# Worcester Housing Success Story

PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS CREATES SAFER CONDITIONS FOR HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has identified stovetop cooking as the leading cause of household fire and fire-related injuries across North America. They are also the second leading cause of fire-related deaths. It is estimated that cooking is responsible for almost half of all reported household fires in the United States, or more than 450 cooking fires every day. More chilling is that the Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that for every single reported fire there are another 30-50 fires that go unreported.



**In the four target buildings, Smartburner's impact has been huge, driving the incident rate of 138 cooking fires annually to zero.**



## THE PROBLEM.

A thorough analysis of fire incident data in the small community of Worcester, Massachusetts revealed a concerning increase in the rate of unattended cooking fires. In 2014, 559 unattended cooking fires were reported throughout the city. The following year, 578 unattended cooking fires were reported, an increase of 3.3 percent. Of particular interest was the fact that in 2015, 138 of all the unattended cooking fires came from 4 high-rise buildings. In other words, nearly a quarter of the city's cooking fires were coming from four buildings. Costs in property damage exceeded \$500,000. Those buildings, and the associated repair costs, belonged to the Worcester Housing Authority (WHA). Additionally,

the resident profile for these buildings revealed that they were all occupied by older adults among whom 86% suffered from physical and/or mental disabilities. In short, these residents were at high risk for fire injury or death.

## THE VISION.

In looking at the data, Lt. Annmarie Pickett of the Worcester Fire Department (WFD) recognized an opportunity to help reduce cooking fire risks in her community and lower the frequency of responses by the Fire Service. Her vision was clear: reduce the number of cooking fires in the city, target the highest risk occupants, and build a model that could be replicated. The solution to the first task came

## BUILDING RISK ANALYSIS



after Lt. Pickett saw SmartBurner at an industry trade show. The idea of preventing fires before they could start made complete sense. The next task was to engage both her fire service colleagues and the city's #1 landlord, the Worcester Housing Authority,

with the objective of helping to protect the highest-at-risk community first.

The WHA, which is also the 2nd largest housing authority in Massachusetts, manages 24 separate State and Federal public housing properties with a portfolio of 6,675 housing units. That the WFD already had an established relationship with the WHA, simplified Lt. Pickett's work of connecting the two groups in support of the campaign to reduce cooking fires. The next step was to secure a FEMA Fire Prevention & Safety grant to help fund a broad cooking fire safety program that included education, training and the SmartBurner product. The 1st grant application secured \$181,787 towards the purchase and installation of SmartBurner; a property manager/tenant education program; and a protocol for measuring the overall impact of the program. More than three thousand individual SmartBurners were installed in the four WHA buildings with 759 apartments and 862 residents. An amendment to the 1st round, secured funding for an additional 60 apartments. In the end, all four buildings were fully outfitted (i.e. 100 percent) with SmartBurner and 100 percent of the residents were educated on cooking fire safety. A 3rd round of funding has been secured, and a 4th round has already been applied for.

## THE RESULT.

Since the first phase of the program began in September 2017, the results have been astounding. There have been no stovetop fires in any of the WHA buildings that have been equipped with SmartBurner. Zero. No loss of life. No resident or fire fighter injuries. No property loss. There has however been an astonishing 96% reduction in emergency responses to the four WHA buildings that once accounted for nearly one quarter of the city's annual incident rate of cooking fires.

Most recently, in February 2019, it was reported that two apartments in WHA buildings did experience a cooking fire. Upon investigation, it was found that while both apartments had SmartBurners installed, the SmartBurners had been

removed and replaced with traditional coil elements. Drawing the obvious safety conclusion and once again recognizing the benefit of SmartBurner, the WHA is now developing a new Standard Operating Guideline designed to ensure that SmartBurners are never again removed in their properties. Among the guidelines being considered are penalties to residents that range from graduated fines to possible eviction.

These new guidelines also offer excellent two-way communication between the WFD and the WHA and helps to ensure the integrity of the program. Overall the program has been very successful in reducing cooking fire risks and injuries. With a total of 77,314 housing units in the city of Worcester there is still much to be done, but this program's success has opened doors to future funding which will further help to, very pro-actively, protect people from cooking fires.

## FINAL WORD.

At Pioneering Technology we are all too familiar with stories like the one from Worcester. For over a decade we have been working with community leaders, fire service professionals and housing authorities to reduce the risks related to cooking fire. In the United States, a home fire is reported every 85 seconds and almost half of these are cooking fires. Whether the cooking fire happens in public housing, a university campus, or a senior's residence, the effects of a cooking fire are astonishingly fast and devastatingly destructive.

We proudly manufacture and distribute products that help protect lives and property by tackling the serious problem of cooking fires. Our products are not just the smart choice, they are the right choice and the right thing to do.

We thank Lt. Pickett for her tremendous effort on behalf of the Worcester community, its fire department and the Worcester Housing Authority. Her ongoing commitment to help save lives and property from the ever-present risk of cooking fires is greatly appreciated and highly commendable.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### SmartBurner = Success

The installation of SmartBurner in the four target WHA buildings has had a tremendous impact on the number of cooking fires; thereby protecting residents, fire fighters and property.

#### 2015

- 138 stove top incidents
- Loss of life
- Property damage
- Fire fighter injuries

#### 2017 to present

- 0 (zero) stove top fires
- 0 (zero) loss of life
- 0 (zero) property damage
- 96 percent reduction in emergency response



Act now and help prevent cooking fires before they start!

1-800-433-6026



NEVER LEAVE COOKING UNATTENDED.

