



MEDIA RELEASE
from the
**YORK COUNTY DEPARTMENT
OF FIRE AND LIFE SAFETY**

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For Immediate Release

Outdoor Grilling in the Winter!

Though grilling is typically thought of as a warm weather activity, many use their grills year-round. A recent reminder of this, along with a lesson to be heeded, was brought to the spotlight by a prominent anchor for ESPN and former CBS "Early Show" host, Hannah Storm. Her experience should serve as a somber lesson to those who grill anytime of the year, and especially in cold weather.

In case you are not familiar with her story, the award-winning sportscaster and producer was preparing dinner outside her home on the night of Dec. 11th. She lit the grill for pre-heating. After a while, she returned to the grill to see if it had warmed up and discovered the flame had gone out. She turned off the propane and opened the lid to the grill. She then turned it back on and tried to reignite the flame. As soon as she did, there was an explosion. It blew the doors off of the grill and caught her shirt and hair on fire. She described the explosion as a "wall of fire" and stated that her neighbor across the street thought a tree had fallen on his house, it was so loud. She suffered 1st, 2nd, and 3rd degree burns. She was burned from her upper chest up and, as a result, lost her eyebrows and about half of her hair. Her left hand was also badly burned because, being left-handed, she used it to remove her flaming shirt.

Fortunately, she is recovering well. She returned to work New Year's Day to co-host the 2013 Rose Parade, but what went wrong? There are several things that are important to know whenever you grill, especially if you are grilling with propane and particularly when the weather is cold. Propane is heavier than air, so it settles and collects downward. This is true anytime, but especially when it is cold outside. What Hannah Storm did right was to open the lid and turn off the propane. (Leaving the doors open would have also been helpful.) What she did wrong was to immediately attempt to reignite the grill. Propane takes a while to dissipate and may take even longer if it is cold or if there is no breeze. If she had waited 5-10 minutes, there would not have been an explosion. When she caught fire, she did not know what to do. Had she dropped to the ground and rolled, the burns to her hand suffered while removing the shirt would not have been as

severe, and most likely would have been non-existent. This real-life story offers some valid lessons, if you grill outside anytime, and especially year-round.

Here are some facts about propane. Propane is a liquid fuel stored under pressure that vaporizes to a gas before it leaves the tank. At normal atmospheric pressure and temperature, it is a non-toxic, colorless and odorless gas. Just like natural gas, an identifying odor is added so it can be readily detected. It becomes flammable when it is mixed with oxygen. Propane liquid is extremely cold and would cause freeze burn or frostbite if exposed to skin. Whenever you use a propane-fueled grill, here is a few safety tips to keep in mind:

- Always follow the manufacturer instructions and keep them handy.
- Propane and charcoal grills are for outdoor use ONLY.
- Keep grills at least 10 feet away from structures and watch out for overhangs (eaves, trees, etc.).
- Wear tight fitted clothing to lessen the chance of catching your clothes on fire. But know that if they do catch fire stop, don't run. Lie down flat on the ground and roll side to side to smother the flames.
- Keep an ABC fire extinguisher nearby when grilling.
- Keep children away from the grill at all times, even when it is not in use.
- Always open the lid before turning on the gas and lighting.
- If the gas does not ignite right away, turn the gas cylinder off, turn the burner control off, leave the lid open and open the doors (if your grill has them).
- Wait 5-10 minutes before trying to relight the grill.
- Never store a propane tank inside a structure (like a home, garage or shed).
- Store cylinders in an upright vertical position in a ventilated area and away from extreme heat (not under the grill).
- Check for leaks by mixing a cup of water and a few drops of dishwashing liquid together. With the cylinder connected to the grill, pour the mixture over the cylinder top and grill connection area. Bubbles indicate a leak.
- If you smell gas or discover a leak, if it is safe to do so, turn off the cylinder valve, turning it to the right (clockwise). If you are unable to turn off the valve, immediately leave the area and dial 9-1-1.
- Consult a qualified service technician if you are having grill or propane cylinder problems. Do NOT try to make repairs to any part of the cylinder.
- Never smoke near a propane tank.
- Do not move a lit or hot grill. Remember to let it cool completely before covering.
- If you disconnect the cylinder from the grill, cover the opening of each with a plastic bag to keep the connections clear.

No matter when you grill, be ever mindful of your safety! If you would like more information, please feel free to contact the York County Department of Fire and Life Safety Office at (757) 890-3600 Monday through Friday from 8:15 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. You are also invited to visit our website at www.yorkcounty.gov/fire.

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