

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

www.suntimes.com

[Back to regular view](#)

<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-fire03.html>

[Print this page](#)

Chicago fire deaths fall to record-low 32 in 2005

January 3, 2006

BY [ROBERT C. HERGUTH](#) Staff Reporter

The number of Chicago fire deaths -- on the decline since 1977 when nearly 200 were recorded -- hit a modern-day record low in 2005, when 32 people were killed, officials disclosed Monday.

The previous record low was in 2004, when there were 36 deaths from Chicago fires, figures show.

"The numbers have been steadily decreasing," said Deputy District Chief Joe Roccasalva, who oversees fire awareness and public education for the Chicago Fire Department.

Increased education, engineering

He attributed the steady drop to several things, including increased education on how to prevent and survive fires, and "increased engineering, with fire codes and people getting smoke detectors."

He also said the department has "better fire equipment and response times."

Most fire-related fatalities occur during the cold-weather months of December, January, February and March. Last January saw the most fire deaths -- seven -- of any other month in 2005, records show.

The winter fires often involve space heaters and candles; the summer ones often involve careless use of smoking, Roccasalva said.

Fire deaths can involve burns and smoke inhalation, among other things.

Smoke detector checks urged

Roccasalva offers this advice to push the fatality numbers even lower: "Get a smoke detector and make sure the battery works."

People too often have a smoke detector but take the battery out to fuel a kid's toy, for example, or they take out the battery while cooking and never replace it, he said.

Batteries should be checked once a month and replaced twice a year, he said. Families also should perform home-escape drills so they know how to get out of the house if a fire breaks out, he said.

The fire department gave away around 20,000 smoke detectors in 2005.

Figures on the total number of fires in Chicago were not immediately available.