

E-cigarette risks: Arizona fire officials see increased fire danger with e-cigarettes

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Jan 1, 2014

PHOENIX - As electronic cigarettes grow in popularity, so do the number of fires they start. Phoenix Fire Department officials say they've noticed the increase and want families to know about the potential danger.

AN ARIZONA COUPLE'S LOSS

"I got to the bedroom door and it was just a huge fire," Vicki Orman said, remembering the fire that burned down much of her Phoenix home in October.

"I was traumatized," she said. "You see your belongings, your home on fire. It's terrible."

Vicki and her husband, Dale, lived in that house for 18 years, they said. But it all changed one day after Vicki plugged in her electronic cigarette and left it charging.

"The fire was confined to the master bedroom, but the rest of the house had quite a bit of smoke and water damage," Dale explained.

In all, the damage was estimated to be more than \$100,000, according to fire records.

Fire officials say the cartridge of the e-cigarette overheated while it was plugged into the charger, sparking the fire.

Vicki said she heard the smoke detector and found the fire in their bedroom.

After the fire, Vicki was in shock.

"I didn't know what to do," Vicki said, "What do you do? Where am I going to go? What about my animals?"

She and her three dogs made it out safely, but Dale suffered smoke inhalation and spent three days in the hospital, he said.

FIRE OFFICIALS SEE A PATTERN

"These things are causing fires," said Phoenix Fire Department Captain and Arson Investigator Gary Hernandez.

He responded to the fire at the Orman's house, but this wasn't the first e-cigarette-related fire he's seen.

“They had plugged this in, in the charger, put in on top of the bed, they left,” he said. “That’s a very dangerous thing.”

Electronic cigarettes use a battery to heat up the steam users inhale to get the nicotine and various flavors.

Vicki says she used the name brand Smokin’ T. They’re re-usable.

Sister station ABC15 contacted the manufacturer of Smokin’ T e-cigarettes, Smokin’ Time, but they didn’t respond to numerous messages.

“I’m not sure why it’s happening and why they’re malfunctioning,” Hernandez said. “But, I think you can be keenly aware that these can malfunction and these can cause a fire.”

There have been several report of e-cigarette-related fires involving various name brands across the country, including at least four in the Phoenix area.

"I'M ANGRY"

“They shouldn’t explode,” Dale said. He said he looked at the instructions that came with the e-cigarette and didn’t see any warning against leaving it to charge for a specific amount of time.

It’s been two months since the fire and the Ormans and their dogs are still living in a hotel room.

“I’m angry that they put out a product that is so dangerous,” Vicki said. “I am angry that I lost some personal property that I can no longer replace...I am angry at myself that I didn’t know better.”

She says she would like to see the manufacturer stop selling this product until they’ve figured out why this happened.

“There’s obviously something wrong,” she said, “We are not the only ones that this has happened to.”

Vicki said she and her husband are considering a lawsuit against the company that makes the e-cigarette that started their fire.

CHECK YOUR SMOKE ALARM

Fire officials say there was one thing that saved the Ormans that day: their smoke detector.

It’s easy to forget, so make sure you check your smoke detector to make sure it’s working.

The FDA is in the process of compiling regulations to oversee electronic cigarettes.