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Did You Know?

Smokejumpers are highly skilled firefighters. They parachute into remote areas to help put out wildfires.

Key Terms

fine—to demand that someone pays money for breaking a law

inferno—intense heat

wildfire—a fire that spreads very fast, making it difficult to put out

CHAPTER 1 | Introduction

People have relied on fire for many thousands of years. Early humans used fire to warm themselves and cook their food. They also used fire to frighten away animals that might hurt them.

Fire is a basic part of modern life. People still use fire to cook and to heat their homes.

Fire can also be a killer. A house fire can turn deadly if people do not get out in time. Fires seriously burn many people. These injuries are very painful and take a long time to heal.

Every year fires destroy many homes and businesses. Fire is expensive. Fires cause more damage than floods, tornadoes, and other disasters combined.

Wildfires

Toasting marshmallows and telling scary stories around a campfire is a lot of fun. But campfires can burn out of control. Wildfires destroy forests and parks. Wildfires also kill many animals.

Some wildfires are caused by lightning. Careless people are also responsible for many wildfires. Dropping a lit cigarette outside on a hot, dry day can start a huge wildfire.

Sometimes people start wildfires on purpose. They may think it's fun. But these fires are no joke. Many homes are destroyed by wildfires. Firefighters risk their lives battling wildfires. People caught starting wildfires are fined or sent to prison.

Fires and Earthquakes

Earthquakes caused some of the worst fire disasters in history. Big cities are most at risk for fires after an earthquake.

Earthquakes damage gas lines. Gas leaks lead to explosions and fires. Earthquakes also damage water pipes. After an earthquake there may not be any water to use to fight the fires. San Francisco, California, and Tokyo, Japan, are two big cities that suffered huge fires after earthquakes.

Office Buildings on Fire

A popular disaster movie of the 1970s was called *The Towering Inferno*. It was about a fire in a high-rise office building.

Office buildings have safety features to protect people from fire. Sprinklers are designed to turn on automatically. Water sprays over a fire to put it out. There are usually fire escapes and fire stairs so people can exit a burning building quickly.

When terrorists crashed two planes into the World Trade Center, the jet fuel exploded and set the twin towers on fire. This real-life towering inferno was the worst fire disaster ever.