

White Earth Home Safety Project Alerts Elder to House Fire

American Indians are at exceedingly high risk of death due to house fires. On the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, for example, the house fire death rate is more than seven times the National average.

Smoke alarms nearly double the chances of surviving a house fire, yet many reservation homes do not have adequate numbers of working smoke alarms.



Myron Fairbanks sitting next to a picture of himself at the 1993 White Earth Pow-Wow.

Because elders are at high risk of house fire death, the White Earth Health Center's Public Health Nurses and Community Health Representatives, and Tribal Home Health Aides teamed up to survey homes for fire safety and to install photoelectric smoke alarms. Photoelectric alarms were chosen because they are less sensitive to sounding false alarms from cooking, and are less likely to be disconnected. The smoke alarms were furnished by the Bemidji Area IHS Injury Prevention program.

A Success Story

Myron Fairbanks, an 84-year old World War II Veteran and enrolled member of the White Earth Reservation, had a close call involving a fire in his trailer in February 2000. Mr. Fairbanks stated that he had just finished dinner and fell asleep on the couch. Shortly after falling asleep, he was awakened by the sound of his new, recently installed, smoke alarm.

A fire had started when a pan of grease left on the stove ignited. Mr. Fairbanks was able to extinguish the fire and save his trailer home. Two hardwired electric smoke alarms in the home never sounded when the fire started.

For more information, contact White Earth Health Center Public Health Nursing at 218-983-4300 or Bemidji Area Indian Health Service at 218-759-3383.