Home Structure Fires that Began with Upholstered Furniture

In 2010-2014, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 5,630 home structure fires per year in which upholstered furniture was the first item ignited. These fires caused an annual average of 440 civilian fire deaths, 700 civilian fire injuries, and $269 million in direct property damage.

On average, one of every 13 reported upholstered furniture fires resulted in death.

Overall, fires beginning with upholstered furniture accounted for 2% of reported home fires but 18% of home fire deaths.
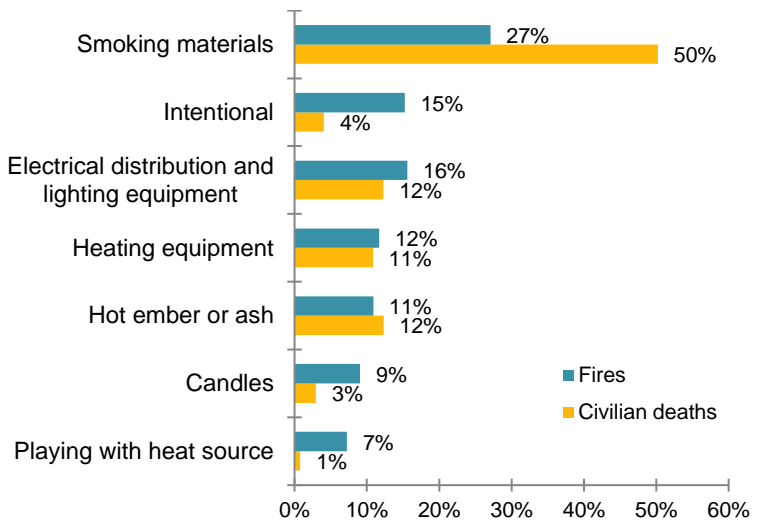
Leading Causes of Upholstered Furniture Fires: 2010-2014

Smoking materials remain the leading cause of upholstered furniture fires and losses. One of every 6.6 such fires started by smoking materials resulted in death.

Portable and fixed space heaters were involved in 11% of the upholstered furniture fires and associated deaths.
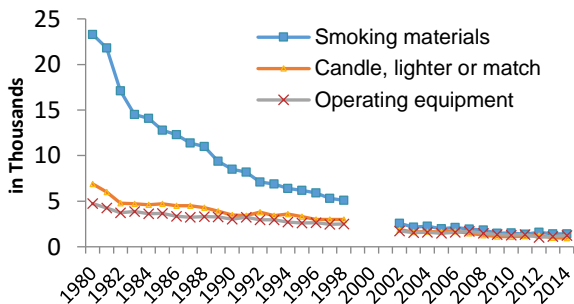
Together, candles, matches and lighters were involved in 20% of the fires and 12% of the deaths.

Electrical failures or malfunctions were factors in 14% of the home upholstered furniture fires and 12% of the deaths. These failures were in all types of electrical appliances, not just electrical distribution or lighting equipment.

Upholstered furniture fires started by smoking materials and associated deaths fell sharply since 1980 despite an increase in deaths in the past few years. The declines in upholstered furniture fires started by candles, matches or lighters and by operating equipment were not as sharp. No clear trend was seen for upholstered furniture deaths from candles, matches and lighters or operating equipment.

Home upholstered furniture fires started by: smoking materials; candles, lighters and matches; or operating equipment; by year 1980-2014

Civilian deaths from home upholstered furniture fires started by: smoking materials; candles, lighters and matches; or operating equipment; by year 1980-2014