

Know Grease, Know Fire: Preventing Oven Fires

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In terms of cooking, grease refers to animal fats and vegetable oils. It oozes and splatters from food during the cooking process onto pans, racks, burners, and nearby surfaces.

Grease that has been liberated from food is prime fuel for a fire. Heat from future cooking dries grease deposits and vaporizes it; if enough vaporized fuel, heat, and oxygen are present a fire can ignite.

Ovens are built for containing most heat, but too much heat can overwhelm even the best insulation and damage equipment.

It's critical that oven owners clean their ovens. There are plenty of horror stories on the Internet about self-cleaning cycles malfunctioning, but there are other options.

- Mix 1/2 Cup of baking soda with water to create a paste. Spread the paste on all surfaces of the oven, but not the heating elements. Wait at least two hours and consider leaving it overnight. Using a spray bottle, apply a mixture of half water and half white vinegar to the paste in the oven. The resulting foam helps to remove food stains. After leaving that for another 30 minutes, use a rubber spatula (if necessary) and rag to remove the baking soda mixture. Finish by wiping everything with a damp cloth.
- Another option involves lemons. Cut five lemons in half, squeeze the juice into a baking tray and place the squeezed lemon ends in the tray as well. Bake at 450°F for 30 minutes. The steam will loosen the grease and grime. After the oven cools, use a damp cloth to wipe the surfaces clean.

If a fire does start in your oven, keep the door closed and turn off the heat. Once the oven cools, you can clean the mess. If the fire escapes the oven, go outside and call 911.

The ideal conclusion to this article would be “No Grease, No Fire,” but there are other potential fuels that can be found in and near ovens. Instead, we'll settle for “No Grease, No Grease Fires.”

For other safety information, visit www.southmetro.org and our agency's social media channels.