

Preventing Thanksgiving Disasters

With the Thanksgiving holiday approaching and a big meal central to the occasion, keeping in mind safe cooking is paramount. Many cooking mishaps are the result of user error versus a product defect or malfunction. As someone who may be presented with these claims, the following paragraphs may provide you insights that can be useful in your evaluation of a claim.

As part of the Thanksgiving meal preparation many dishes are baked in the oven; this can result in a dirty oven. To save cleaning time after the meal, many cooks will start the self-cleaning feature of the oven just before everyone sits down to their holiday meal. A short time later the house starts filling with smoke and flames are visible in the oven. In most cases, this is not an indication of a product failure but instead is the oven functioning as designed.

Consider how the self-cleaning cycle of an oven works. The oven temperature is raised to 700–800 degrees Fahrenheit and held at this temperature for around 3 hours. The intent is to burn off accumulated debris within the oven. Self-cleaning ovens require a degree of cleaning prior to starting the cleaning cycle. The instructions for most ovens state that “excess” debris must be removed prior to starting the self-clean cycle. If this is not done, instead of a small flash fire, this results in a large and sustained fire. As a safety feature, self-cleaning ovens are equipped with a thermal lock to prevent opening the oven door when the oven is above 500 degrees Fahrenheit. This is to protect the user from burn injuries that can result from introducing air into an extremely hot oven. This locking mechanism will hamper attempts to extinguish the fire. The good news is that the fire in the oven will have a limited air supply. In addition, the oven is designed to withstand high temperature events. But, if you are concerned about the flames in the oven, unplug or turn off the oven. The fire will eventually extinguish itself. As always, **READ** and **FOLLOW** the manufacturer’s instructions.

For many families, the Thanksgiving meal includes deep fried turkey. There are some basic precautions that should be taken to prevent a turkey fryer disaster. First, don’t put too much oil in the cooking pot. Placing a turkey in a pot with too much oil will cause the oil to overflow the pot and can be ignited by the open flame of the burner. It is best to follow the manufacturer’s instructions on how to determine the proper amount of oil to put in the pot. Also, make sure the turkey is thawed and completely dry. Introducing water into hot oil will result in a violent reaction which can result in personal injury and property damage.

It is also important to note that turkey fryers do not have an automatic temperature control system. Therefore it is important that the fryer be constantly attended by an adult and the oil temperature monitored with a suitable thermometer. Also, placement of the fryer is important. Do not place the fryer inside a structure (e.g. garage), under an overhang, or on a wooden deck. Above all **READ** and **FOLLOW** the manufacturer’s instructions.

Pyro-Technical Investigations has the expertise and experience to investigate your appliance-related claims. For more information or to discuss your specific needs, call us at 800.377.1352.

Have a safe and enjoyable Thanksgiving with family and friends.

