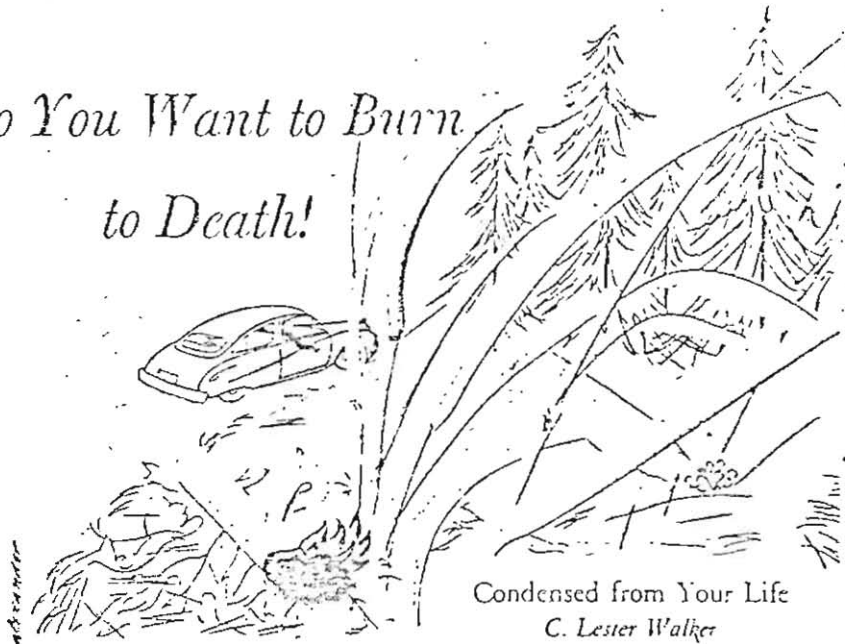


So You Want to Burn to Death!



Condensed from *Your Life*
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TELLTALE BURN on the window sill gave the clue to what had happened. Ellen had been smoking a cigarette as she put her three-year-old daughter to bed. Before tucking the child in she balanced the cigarette on the window sill. Then she went downstairs. Something, perhaps a gust of wind through the open window, tipped the cigarette off into the cardboard wastebasket. Tissue paper and cellulose wrappings did the rest. The flames leaped to the filmy curtains, the flammable wallboard and woodwork.

Ellen rushed up to the room but a wall of smoke and flame beat her to her knees. As she groped for the crib, her lungs filled with smoke and a stabbing pain. Fighting for breath, she collapsed on the floor.

The greatest single cause of fire in the United States today: the cigarette plus the careless smoker

Ellen and her child were victims of just one of the more than 115,000 fires set last year in the United States by careless smoking — America's greatest single fire cause today. Last spring the New York Fire Department reported that careless smokers were responsible for \$5,825,000 of the \$20,249,920 property damage done by fires in New York City in 1949; no other single cause of fire did so much damage.

Obviously it isn't very bright to throw away or leave around a tiny glowing torch like a cigarette. Remember, warns an Actna Insurance

advertisement in *Newsweek*, that the temperature of the lighted end ranges from 800 to 1200 degrees Fahrenheit. Remember, too, that paper burns at 450 degrees Fahrenheit, wood at about 475 degrees.

"Never smoke in bed!" How often have you heard that warning? Yet in recent years some 2500 Americans have successfully cremated themselves, many burning down the building with them.

Hospitals, rooming houses and hotels are the special victims of the in-bed smoker. George Zolac, salesman, back in his hotel room after a tough day on the road, props himself up in bed to read. As he dozes off, his cigarette falls on his dressing gown. It flares up, ignites the sheets, the cotton mattress. Zolac is doomed — a human torch of screaming, scarlet flame. Another hotel holocaust begins.

Mishandling of cigarettes four years ago started the terrible hotel fires at the LaSalle in Chicago and the Canfield in Dubuque. The LaSalle fire, which cost 61 lives, first broke out in a cocktail lounge, but exhaustive investigation afterward disclosed that the fire-setting agent must have come through a ventilation hole from the elevator shaft. And only a cigarette could have started the fire.

At the Canfield, careless patrons of a bar left unextinguished cigarette butts at the tables. A waitress collected them into a cardboard trash container and set it inside a closet. Shortly after midnight a customer

noticed a crackling sound, like a mouse gnawing, and smelled smoke. Investigating, he found the closet wall in flames. The Canfield tragedy, occurring only three days after the LaSalle holocaust, took 19 lives.

You don't need big places or crowds to produce the biggest tragedies. At the curtain counter of a small department store, a woman buying theatrical gauze rests her cigarette on the base of an inflammable plastic stand displaying a frilly curtain sample. In seconds the curtain counter is a sheet of flame. Customers stampede for the doors. They are the revolving type; they jam. The crowd becomes panic-crazed; people trample one another and 22 die.

Detroit, Minneapolis, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, among others, now forbid smoking in some retail stores. But most prohibiting ordinances apply only where 300 or more persons are under one roof. Harrisburg, Pa., offers a shining exception: no smoking in any retail store with more than five clerks.

Too long Americans have believed that the fire accidentally set is just "too bad." In many European countries the person who causes a fire is considered to have committed a crime against society and is liable for the damage it does to the property of others. Thus held to strict account, the European is more careful, as is reflected in the fire records of his cities. Per capita fire losses in Vienna prior to the war were eight cents. In Hamburg six cents. Bor-

deaux's record shows 52 cents. Lisbon's 20. By contrast, in the same years, 450 American cities were marking up an average per capita fire loss of \$2.22!

There is encouraging evidence, however, that our courts are finally beginning to crack down on careless-smoking criminals. A Brooklyn judge not long ago fined 73 men and 66 women in one day for violating no-smoking instructions in crowded stores. Another judge slapped heavy fines on 51 workers who had smoked in factory buildings against municipal fire regulations. And recently some West Coast longshoremen lighted cigarettes on a ship berthed at Los Angeles, with 7660 cases of dynamite aboard. Each got 180 days.

In Milwaukee every hotel room now displays a new law: Smoke and cause a fire, and you will be fined or imprisoned whether you caused it "willfully or wantonly or not." Rhode Island prosecutes for tossing a cigarette butt from a car. In California it's a crime to place a live cigarette, cigar or pipe where it might "either directly or indirectly" cause a fire. And Detroit has convicted 30 in four months for smoking-started blazes in hotels.

What causes a cigarette to go on burning after it is tossed away? The California Fire Marshal's laboratory recently tested 55 brands of cigarettes and found that the paper in each had been treated with precipitate chalk; this makes the paper more porous, thus letting in more

oxygen and creating a kind of natural draft which keeps the cigarette burning to the end.

Tests by the National Bureau of Standards showed that cigarettes would seldom set anything afire until they had lain still long enough to burn an inch. If the butt of a cigarette was tipped with cardboard, cork or a filter to the length of at least an inch, it was less than half as likely to start a fire.

The bureau also discovered that coating the butt end of a cigarette with sodium silicate ("water glass") totally sealed the pores of the paper; when discarded that cigarette would not continue to burn. And the California fire laboratory proved that, if sodium-silicate bands of only one eighth inch were applied at intervals inside the paper, the cigarette when laid down would soon go out. In England, Switzerland and other countries abroad people have been smoking slow-burning cigarettes — and liking them — for years. In the United States, however, the tobacco industry is not yet ready to make its product less of a fire hazard. The faster cigarettes burn, the more are used, the bigger the sales.

The cigarette companies are not happy about their products' damaging fire record. Philip Morris now puts "Don't Smoke in Bed" placards in hotel rooms, and Lucky Strike has been plugging fire prevention on its big radio shows. In Canada some of the biggest companies print warnings against careless smoking on the back flaps of their packages.

Here are a few canons of good smoking behavior:

1. When you smoke outdoors, break your match in two before throwing it away; and always stamp out or grind out your butts.
2. Never lay down a lighted cigarette, except in an ash tray that balances *in* or snuffs out the butt.
3. Don't smoke where "No Smoking" signs forbid.
4. Never throw a cigarette out of a window or out of an automobile.
5. When you're in a closet, an attic or a barn — don't smoke.
6. When smoking, never go near flammable liquids, such as turpentine, gasoline.
7. In bed — especially if alone — *never smoke*.

Those precautions may save you from a home burned down, a death in the family, or from being yourself the victim in a horrible and excruciating end.

