

HISTORY OF FIRE PREVENTION WEEK:

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK WAS ESTABLISHED TO COMMEMORATE THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE, THE TRAGIC 1871 CONFLAGRATION THAT KILLED MORE THAN 250 PEOPLE, LEFT 100,000 HOMELESS, DESTROYED MORE THAN 17,400 STRUCTURES AND BURNED MORE THAN 2000 ACRES. THE FIRE BEGAN ON OCTOBER 8, BUT CONTINUED INTO AND DID MOST OF ITS DAMAGE ON OCTOBER 9, 1871.

ACCORDING TO POPULAR LEGEND, THE FIRE BROKE OUT AFTER A COW – BELONGING TO MRS. CATHRINE O’LEARY – KICKED OVER A LAMP, SETTING FIRST THE BARN, THEN THE WHOLE CITY ON FIRE. THIS CAUSE HAS BEEN LEGEND FOR MORE THAN 130 YEARS, BUT THERE IS NO PROOF.

THIS WAS ONE OF THE MAJOR FIRES THAT CHANGED THE WAY THAT FIREFIGHTERS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS THOUGHT ABOUT FIRE SAFETY. ON THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE, THE FIRE MARSHALS ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (KNOWN TODAY AS THE INTERNATIONAL FIRE MARSHALS ASSOCIATION), DECIDED THAT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE SHOULD HENCEFORTH BE OBSERVED NOT WITH FESTIVITIES, BUT IN A WAY THAT WOULD KEEP THE PUBLIC INFORMED ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRE PREVENTION. THE COMMEMORATION GREW INCREMENTALLY OFFICIAL OVER THE YEARS.

IN 1920, PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON ISSUED THE FIRST NATIONAL FIRE PREVENTION DAY PROCLAMATION, AND SINCE 1922, FIRE PREVENTION WEEK HAS BEEN OBSERVED ON THE SUNDAY THROUGH SATURDAY PERIOD IN WHICH OCTOBER 9 FALLS. THIS IS THE LONGEST RUNNING PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY OBSERVANCE ON RECORD. THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES HAS SIGNED A PROCLAMATION PROCLAIMING A NATIONAL OBSERVANCE DURING THAT WEEK EVERY YEAR SINCE 1925.