

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned in to another
edition of The Break Room, a

weekly conversation about how
the City of St Augustine

works from those who do the
work every day. Hosted by the

City of St Augustine's
Communications Director, Melissa

Wissel. The Break Room offers a
closer look at the different

city departments and provides
updates on current and upcoming

projects and events. And now
your host, Melissa Wissel.

MELISSA: Welcome to The Break Room.
Thanks for tuning in. I'm

Melissa Wissel, Communications
Director for the City of St

Augustine. In studio this week,
we're talking about fire

prevention, fire safety, and
some storm safety reminders

with the City of St
Augustine's Fire Marshal, Abby

Pedigo. Abby, welcome back. ABBY:
Thanks for having me back. It's

always a pleasure. We, I'm
going to offer you a belated

happy fire prevention week.
Hurricane Ian kind of threw us

off schedule, but it's never a
bad time to talk about

prevention. Tell us about this
year's theme. ABBY: Yeah, that's

right. So, happy Fire
Prevention Week. This year's

theme is: Fire won't wait. Plan
your escape. So, that is

referring to the speed that

fires can start, and can

grow, and how quickly they can
take over a space, and the

importance of having a home
escape plan, and knowing your

ways out of the house, and
making sure that everyone in

the house is familiar with
how to get out, and having a

meeting place out in the yard,
somewhere where you can go, and

call 911 and wait for the fire
department to come. And so so

that's what we're talking about
with this year's theme. MELISSA: And

we've, we I say we as an
American country, we've been

doing this for a long time, this
year's a special anniversary. ABBY:

Yeah, this is the 100th
anniversary of Fire Prevention

Week, so it is the longest
running public safety campaign

in America. MELISSA: That's pretty cool. ABBY:
It is cool, yeah. MELISSA: And when you

talk about the burning, that
little bit of time, you've been

on the the show before. There's
something that was interesting

that I never thought about, is
the materials in which things

are built now nowadays. ABBY: Yeah.
Yup. So, this, homes nowadays

are burning faster than ever.
You have as little as two

minutes to get out of a home
after a fire starts and that's

because of the materials
they're using, the layout

of the homes now, the open
concept that everybody is so

crazy about. It
contributes more to the spread

of of toxic gases and smoke and
heat. And then the plastics that

are used with building
nowadays, the lightweight

trusses, the plywood, all that
stuff is just contributes to

homes burning a lot faster. MELISSA: I
wouldn't think of that, but

you're right. You can't close
the door to an open floor plan.

ABBY: Right, right. No, exactly. MELISSA: So,
unless it's in the bedroom

down that little side hallway,
your whole entire living space. MELISSA:

Exactly and and fire can just

spread that much easier and

that much quicker. MELISSA: And the materials too, I would think,

also what are our home, household products are made of.

ABBY: Exactly. Yeah, it's it's not just the materials that are

used in building construction, but also the furniture and the

rugs and the curtains and all the plastics, that I mean, if you

think about the amount of plastic stuff you have in your

house nowadays, if you have kids all the toys.. MELISSA: And the bins and

the great little wooden, the organizer bins ABBY: And

everything you can think of now usually has some sort of

plastic component to it. MELISSA:

Flammability. ABBY: Yes. Yep. MELISSA: Next

time you go to buy all those
cool cute bins at IKEA, think

twice. Yeah I think that's
Scandinavian wood it's it's

great. But it's not very
sturdy. ABBY: Right, yeah, exactly.

MELISSA: Yeah, I would imagine an old,
sturdy, heavy-duty wood couch

would take longer to burn. ABBY: That's
exactly right. Yup. Yup and the

heavy timber homes and yeah,
that older

furniture. MELISSA: When we talk
about preparedness too, fire,

smoke alarms, fire alarms,
sleeping areas. What are, what

are some good reminders for
folks? ABBY: Yeah. I mean, I

kind of mentioned it but
keeping doors closed when you

sleep. If you do have a fire at
your house, try to close doors

behind you when you're getting
out, that will just contain the

fire, contain the super heated
gases and the toxic gases, so

the fire can't spread as
quickly throughout the home. But

yeah, having smoke alarms
throughout the house. You should

have a smoke alarm in every
bedroom, outside of the sleeping

areas, and on every level of the
home. And we always say,

checking those monthly, changing
the batteries twice a year, They

make the 10 year battery life

smoke alarms now with the

lithium ion batteries, so we
definitely recommend those,

because they can the last of
full 10 years usually. But having

those smoke alarms, checking
them, sleeping with your doors

closed. And then like I
mentioned earlier, having a home

escape plan with your family,
making sure you know two ways

to get out of the house, front
door a back door maybe a window.

Make sure your windows open and
you know how to open them.

We've talked about it before,
but houses in this city are

just old and, you know, the
moisture can affect getting the

windows open easily. So, making
sure everybody in the home

knows how to open the window
and and can get out of it if

they need to. And then
having a meeting place out in

the front yard where where you
and your family can go and

stressing the importance to
your kids and your family

members about not going back
inside the house for anything

once you're outside. MELISSA: Right. And
the pets are hard, too, because

if they're hiding somewhere you
want to save them, but you

really need to get out. ABBY: I mean pets
are smart. Typically, they will

get out of the house before
before the the people do,

sometimes. But yeah, if your pet's
inside that can definitely be

hard, but we will go in. We will
get it out if we can and. MELISSA: As

long as it's safe, right? ABBY: Yes.

Yup. MELISSA: And if I don't know how to

do this, install it, or I'm just
not sure. You guys will come

and help. ABBY: We will come install
them for you. Yup. We'll bring

our ladder. We'll bring some
smoke alarms. We have a whole

cabinet full of smoke alarms at
the fire station right now. So,

if you need smoke alarms,
please give us a call, and we

will come out and install them
for you for free. We want to

make sure you're safe. MELISSA: And it's

not anything. I know we've

talked about going into homes
of people who live alone or the

elderly. It's for anybody. ABBY:

Yeah. Yup. Yup. Absolutely.

MELISSA: Doesn't matter age or anything

like that. Just give a call. ABBY: If

you need smoke alarms, call us,
please. MELISSA: If you're just now

tuning into The Break Room, I
have Abby Pedigo with us this

week. She is the City's Fire
Marshal. We're talking about

fire safety, fire prevention. I
want to switch gears here

before we wrap up today and
talk a little bit about the

hurricane. I mentioned.

Hurricane Ian came in kind of

threw us off our fire
prevention week schedule. But

you guys really jump in action,
not just as firefighters. You

take on a different role. The
Chief takes on a different

role. Can you talk a little
bit? Share with our listeners.

How the fire department
fared? ABBY: We're such a small

department. We really have to
be versatile. So, we all

kind of take on a different
role when the hurricane hits.
Chief Aviles becomes kind
of the Emergency Manager almost

of the City. And he's kind
of an advisor. To

everybody. He's staying up on
the weather and he's attending

lots of meetings. So, I go into
an incident command role in in

conjunction with St Johns
County Fire Rescue. We have

an incident management team that
I'm a member of. And that

includes St Johns County
Fire Rescue, the Sheriff's

Office, and so so we all meet
and just do kind of the

behind-the-scenes work. There's
people from the operations

department, people from
logistics and planning and

finance, and we're together just
kind of making decisions in the

background that that can impact
everybody. MELISSA: And you have your

own command center. I mean, we
all meet in the EOC. ABBY: Dustin Hamilton

Fire Inspector was at the EOC. MELISSA:

He is our Fire Safety Inspector.

But, he becomes the guy, boots on
the ground at the EOC. But you

all have your own incident
center. Separate because

you're all responding to not
only fire, but emergencies.

ABBY: Right. Road closures. Trying to
get the roads open again

and just coordinating with our
USR teams, our urban search

rescue teams, which the county
has several USR teams. S=And our

city has 2 USR teams. One
for the mainland and one for

the island. And so yes. The
incident management team that I

was a part of meets out of the

County Fire Rescue Admin

Building. And yeah, we're
just coordinating all those

things that you talked about.

We need to know

where the USR teams that are
at any given time. So, if a call

comes out, we can dispatch them
accordingly and and get the

roads open again. And we keep
track of all the downed power lines

and that sort of thing and. MELISSA: One
of the, I want to ask you this,

and I want to use this
opportunity to remind our

listeners. You, people who have
been here through, we'll call it

Matthew, Irma, Dorian, the
Nor'easters. They want to stay.

ABBY: Yeah, I can understand
wanting to stay and protect

your house and protect your
things and you know, see

your city through this this big
event. I I totally get it.

It's just, it ends up being very
taxing on our departments when

people end up staying and then it
decide midway through the storm

or in the thick of it that they
do not want to stay anymore. And

the streets are flooded. We
can't get our engines down most

of the roads to evacuate
people. We can't get

ambulances throughout the City.
If somebody's having a

medical emergency, we can't get
an ambulance to them, and it's

it's really scary. But we do
have, we were able to get quite

a few high water vehicles for
the storm to use, just in case

of emergency. And we ended up
facilitating 18 rescues in the

middle. MELISSA: Oh wow. ABBY: Of the storm
just for residents who stayed

and decided that as
their homes were filling up

with water. MELISSA: It hit that panic
button at the same time. ABBY: As

they started seeing that water
rising. They they decided that

they did not want to stay after
all. And it it really puts our

guys in a in a tight spot. You
know, we don't want to leave

anybody stranded or... MELISSA:

Yeah that's your calling is to

save and rescue people. ABBY: That's
our job. So, but it is very

taxing and and our resources
were spread very thin during

the storm, trying to trying to
get people out. MELISSA: I'll give a

quick shout out, obviously to
also to Hardis. He was

recognized.. ABBY: There's a great photo of Hardis
floating around. MELISSA: But that really

does capture what all of you
were doing,=. ABBY: And I was going to

say, I mean, you don't get to
see the other 29 firefighters

who were doing the exact same
thing at the same time. But

yeah, we were in and out
of homes and saved a rabbit and
Eighteen home,

eighteen people and a rabbit. And

and there were 26 rescues
overall with within the county,

as well. But 18 of those
came out of the City. MELISSA: And I'm

going to bring up another
subject because this is the one

thing in our, in my world of the
communicating and community

outreach, is the cars driving
through the floodwaters

creating wakes. ABBY: Wake. Yes,
waking out the homes. I mean,

it's it's so sad that people's
homes are already filling up

with water and then for
people to drive their cars

through. It adds up, just
adding to the water level,

increasing the water level, and
doing that much more damage.

MELISSA; Pushes it. ABBY: To people's homes,
yeah. So, I. MELISSA: And it doesn't

take a high speed, either. We're
not necessarily talking about

speeding through. Although it
does. I did see some of

that. ABBY: The driving in
general, it tends to, tends to

create a wake, and yeah. So, we
really encourage people not to,

not to drive through the storm.
I know it can be tempting, you

want to get out and and kind of
assess the damage or see your

house. But that was, quite a few
of the calls we got, too, during

the middle of the storm were
for people whose cars had

stalled out in the water, and
and they're having trouble

getting out of their car, and we
had to go help them out and

rescue them out of their cars.
So, it's another thing to

consider if you're, if you're
driving around. There's a

really good chance that your
car will stall out. But yeah,

please please be respectful to
the to the residents and

don't be driving around in the
high water. MELISSA: Yeah, there was the

other one I heard and you know,
it, a little bit of a public

reprimand. Shame on you who are
riding through. I think

somebody was pulling somebody

behind a car. I heard. I didn't

see it, but I heard about it so.

ABBY: Doesn't surprise me. ABBY: It's, you know, it's

like you said, it's tempting. It

seems harmless in some in most

cases. I don't think people are

intentionally driving through

neighborhoods trying to create

wake. But please be aware of

what that does. And you're right,

to be that homeowner who's,

you know, standing in their

garage from their house looking

in, or standing in their home,

and to just have that wake push

through underneath the doors

and stuff, is bad enough. ABBY; It's

already bad enough it's insult to injury. MELISSA: That's

right. Yup. So, well, lots of

activity at the Fire

Department. You're doing a

great job as our Fire Marshal. ABBY:

Thank you. MELISSA: Thanks for

everything you do and we're out

of time. ABBY: Alright. MELISSA: We'll have

you back though to talk about

holiday fire safety. We didn't

even talk about that. ABBY: Nope. MELISSA: If

you missed part of this

broadcast and want to go back

and listen from the beginning,

you can find us at CityStAugRadio.com. That shows all of

our past shows, and there's also

a listing now. You can find us

on podcast. So, if you want to

see what platforms you can find

us on that podcast, find that

again at CityStAugRadio.com. Thank you for tuning

in. We want to keep you

informed about what's happening
in and around the city and most

importantly that you hear it
here from the people doing the

work and making it happen every
day. You can follow the City @CityStAug on Facebook,
Twitter, and Instagram. And of

course, the Fire Department is
on Facebook and Instagram

@CityStAugFire. Thanks
again for tuning in, until next

time. ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to
The Break Room, a weekly program

addressing projects and
programs by the City of St

Augustine. Join us each week as
the City's Communications

Director, Melissa Wissel, has
in-depth conversations with the

people who make our town work
to meet the needs of our

community. The Break Room is
produced by Communication

Specialist for the City of St.
Augustine, Cindy Walker. See

you at this time next week for
another edition of The Break

Room.