

The Break Room with Abby Pedigo, Fire Marshall, October 21, 2025

Narrator:

You tuned in to another edition of. *The Break Room*. A weekly conversation about how the City of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the City of Saint 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 Wissel:

Welcome to *The Break Room* thanks for joining us. In studio this week we're reminding our listeners about fire safety and fire prevention with City of Saint Augustine Fire Marshall Abby Pedigo and we've got a 100 year anniversary to share with everyone. Abby, welcome back to *The Break Room*.

Abby Pedigo:

Thanks for having me, Melissa. It's nice to be back.

Melissa Wissel:

Let's talk about your 100th anniversary we seem to always have these 100th anniversary of this 150 years of that. What can the fire department brag about?

Abby Pedigo:

So this year is the 100th anniversary of fire prevention week being proclaimed a national observance so it was done back in 1925 by by president Calvin Coolidge. And this 100th anniversary makes it the longest running public health campaign in our country so super cool for fire prevention.

Melissa Wissel:

That's cool, is there anything that, anything that you know that prompted him to do that at that time?

Abby Pedigo:

Yes, fire prevention week is always based is always doing the same week of October 9th and commemoration of the great Chicago Fire which was a huge Chicago huge fire that burned in Chicago started on October 8th, 1871, and it burned for several days it burned over 2000 acres destroyed 100,000 homes it was a a huge fire that burned for a long time and and ever since then fire prevention week has been more at the forefront of of you know people 's minds.

Melissa Wissel:

I don't think I knew it did that much damage. I know it was a long burning fire. Do they know what started it?

Abby Pedigo:

There really there are rumors that of a lady was milking her cow and the cow kicked over a lantern , a fuel-fired lantern but I I don't know if there's any legitimacy to that. It's just what people say.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. So I guess they didn't ban lanterns.

Abby Pedigo:

OK so back then the first fire prevention week was probably about you know keeping an eye on your cow and not leaving your Lantern in the hay or unattended right right.

Melissa Wissel:

OK well OK so let's talk about fire safety fire prevention every let's OK before we go into some of the other stuff which is coming up with the holidays that we talked about with trees and flames. Every year there's a campaign theme so what's this year 's theme?

Abby Pedigo:

Correct yeah this year 's theme is “charge into fire safety” and that is in reference to lithium ion battery safety in the home so lithium ion batteries are more popular than they've ever been there in so many tools and toys and devices that we use every day. And they're a great tool for us they can store a lot of energy in a very small space. They're rechargeable they have a long life cycle but because they are so powerful and they have so much energy stored in in such a small space they can be very dangerous too and they are prone to starting fires. So this year's campaign stresses the importance of buying safely, charging safely, and recycling these batteries safely. So when they talk about safe buying of lithium ion batteries they're talking about buying only listed products, products that are UL listed or ETL listed that have gone through some strenuous safety testing and and and meet certain standards.

Melissa Wissel:

And so that would suggest there are some that are not.

Abby Pedigo:

Exactly

Melissa Wissel:

And how do I know that.

Abby Pedigo:

There are well it's it can be hard to tell but some of them are off market brands? Devices that are made overseas sometimes have not gone through the same safety testing and meet the same standards that these listed brands have so if they have a UL mark. On them or an ETL mark or sometimes as CSA mark.

Melissa Wissel:

Is that a tag?

Abby Pedigo:

And it's kind of like a tag?

Melissa Wissel:

Or label.

Abby Pedigo:

yeah kind of a label usually. The ones that are listed will brag about being listed because it's it's kind of a strenuous process to go through this listing so so they will they'll be stamped usually in marked to show that they're reputable.

Melissa Wissel:

So watch your. watch your Amazon purchases maybe would be.

Abby Pedigo:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

We're not allowed in the. Stores we click.

Abby Pedigo:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

Let me find the cheapest one.

Abby Pedigo:

Right look through the information look through the description and and try to find one that's listed so so that's what they talk about when they talk about safely buying these products. Another component of this is charging your devices safely so you're supposed to only use the cords that come with your devices to charge them if if something happens to your chargers. Don't go get an aftermarket charger when a universal charger from the gas station you should be using the chargers that come with your devices to charge them and that's that's going to be the safest way to do that.

Melissa Wissel:

So if I get so some. I'm going to ask. That makes me think of when you get one and you get the charger and you get the extra cord and then you go buy another one and like Oh no I've got another charger and another cord and so it really should be saving those for those for those larger lithium ion OK.

Abby Pedigo:

Right. Yeah yeah typically the the code that it comes with I mean if you're buying the exact same phone and it has the same battery and it's the same manufacturer then that's OK but you don't want to use different manufacturers cords with with different devices and that sort of thing.

Melissa Wissel:

Again. That off market OK.

Abby Pedigo:

Right right and and then also charging devices on a nice hard surface so a flat hard surface like a table or a a desk for charging tablets and watches and phones you don't want to

charge them on soft, on the bed or on the couch because if they do start to get hot, they're more susceptible to lighting the material around them.

Melissa Wissel:

Are the is I'm gonna ask you a question just off the top of my head. I noticed I did buy a charger, I'm going to have to go back now and look, and I found that my device was a lot hotter on this charger than I had noticed previously so maybe I should.

Abby Pedigo:

yeah so I would check on it and and there are things to look for to know if a device is susceptible to starting a fire if the device gets damaged. If it does start to get really hot if it starts swelling or bulging if it has if it starts making sounds popping or hissing sounds or even releasing certain smells these are all ways to tell that your battery might be damaged and that the device may start a fire so those are things to look for?

Melissa Wissel:

Wow. Umm OK wow.

Abby Pedigo:

Yeah and and then the last component is recycling batteries responsibly. So you're not supposed to just throw lithium ion batteries in the Trash. They can start fires especially if they get crushed we've seen we've seen trash truck fires garbage truck fires and recycling truck fires because when those compactors start crushing the the material in the in the truck if there are lithium ion batteries in there they can get crushed and damaged and then they can start fires so. You're supposed to take these batteries to a safe recycling facilities. Nearby here, we have, I looked into it Lowe's, Home Depot and Staples are all safe battery recycling facilities here that we can take things to.

Melissa Wissel:

And we do a recycle event

Abby Pedigo:

Yes

Melisa Wissel:

in November

Abby Pedigo:

Yes we do. do they have batteries for that?

Melissa Wissel:

we're more to follow on it. OK perfect. they do we do and I know that for me personally I bring it in Our General Services department has a box and I think some of our break rooms have boxes for battery recycle. I'm going to ask another question is. Uh can you give me a disc what would what is the most common lithium ion batteries that maybe that's a dumb question but is it like a is it like a drill? Those big heavy ones?

Abby Pedigo:

Well those are those are the types of lithium ion batteries yeah it drills any power tools E bikes use lithium ion batteries electric scooters our watches, Our phones basically any rechargeable battery nowadays is probably lithium ion.

Melissa Wissel:

OK so not necessarily like the Duracell where you get the 18 pack from Costco that's not rechargeable.

Abby Pedigo:

Right right usually those single use batteries are just alkaline. There are some being made from lithium but not the lithium ion it's really these rechargeable batteries that that tend to be the most dangerous.

Melissa Wissel:

OK I will tell you that we were talking earlier I don't know if anybody else saw it but there was a social media video meme post about somebody 's dog. Scratching at it and it sparked a fire right there on their on their carpet on the rug yeah.

Abby Pedigo:

Yeah damaging the battery that's that's I've never seen one from the dog but but usually the batteries getting damaged tends to cause the most fires that we see it's either a power tool that gets dropped or an E bike that gets wrecked or run over or something that ends up causing a fire.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. Well that's a really great topic fire safety I think all that lithium battery I had no idea so thank you for that education this morning today.

Abby Pedigo:

Yes absolutely that's that's the reason behind the campaign is to educate and inform.

Melissa Wissel:

If you're just now tuning in you're listening to *The Break Room* I'm Melissa Wissel communications director I have Abby Pedigo with us she is our Fire Marshall. We were mentioning the campaign of this year 's theme was the “charge into fire safety” lithium ion batteries in your home other things though that we talked about with fire prevention that I want to touch on before we have to go is coming up on the holidays. Just being careful of. Other normal things that we would normally think about. Things like candles, Christmas tree decorations, dried out trees, fryers all that. Give us some of those good reminders.

Abby Pedigo:

Yeah yeah these can all contribute to fires too and and you mentioned it earlier but nowadays with with the contents of things in people 's homes peoples furniture and and all the plastic goods and things that are in their homes if you do have a fire in your home you only have about one to 2 minutes sometimes to escape so it's important to. To have. Fire Protection systems in place to have functioning smoke alarms for early warning to have a plan for escape make sure you're you're exiting paths are clear and your doors and windows are accessible so you can get out quickly just to set yourself up for success if you ever do have a fire in the house but but you know during the holidays Thanksgiving and Christmas. Are our two biggest fire days because people are cooking they get distracted. In the kitchen sometimes forget to set timers or leave things unattended and and fires can definitely start in the kitchen so be mindful of that.

Melissa Wissel:

Turkey fryers.

Abby Pedigo:

Turkey fryers can be dangerous. Make sure you take your fryers outside. Make sure your turkey is is fully thawed out before you put it in the the hot grease. Don't put a frozen Turkey in the hot grease and make sure that you don't have too much cooking oil in your in your pot before you put the Turkey in because it's going to overflow if you do so those are all things to keep in mind. Candles like you mentioned Christmas tree lights. Check your lights before you before you put them up each year and make sure they're not kinked or frayed and make sure they're in good shape and you're not connecting too many strings of lights together space heaters or a big one so all the new space heaters now have a little safety feature on the bottom so if the space heater falls over. It will automatically shut off so if if you if you have an old antiquated space heater that doesn't have that feature, consider replacing your your old heater with a new one that will automatically shut off if it falls over because if it does end up on the carpet. You know next to the curtains or something that could easily start a fire.

Melissa Wissel:

Keep it away from the furniture

Abby Pedigo:

yes it's supposed to be 3 feet from anything combustible curtains or bedding or clothes or anything like that.

Melissa Wissel:

and I I kind of jumped in on what you were saying before I want you to repeat again not to put so many plugs on your extension cords.

Abby Pedigo:

right don't don't plug in 100 strings of Christmas lights don't overload. You're you're multi plug adapters we know that there's several plugs on those adapters but you don't have to fill in every single one.

Melissa Wissel:

and power strips

Abby Pedigo:

your power strips yeah keep keep an eye on the manufacturers recommendations how much they're rated for and a big one too is just make sure you can see all of your cords you shouldn't have electrical cords running through the ceiling or through the walls or. Under the rug where you can't keep an eye on them because then if they do start to get freed or damaged. You're less likely to notice and and they can they can heat up and be behind the walls or under the rug and you won't even know.

Melissa Wissel:

So my little Christmas village where I have like 10 little houses with the lights that plug into them I shouldn't put them all on one thing even though they come with those handy little piggyback plugs they're like oh look I can put 3 of these in time.

Abby Pedigo:

if they're rated for that if the plug is rated for that if it's designed for that if it's listed for that like they talked about then that's fine but but if you're if you're overdoing it with what they recommend then consider getting some other plugs and right right exactly?

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Melissa Wissel:

And don't hide it behind the don't hide it behind the the hutch that I can't get to it.

Abby Pedigo:

OK. Right.

Melissa Wissel:

. Unsightly is better than catching on fire.

Abby Pedigo:

Yeah, unfortunately

Melissa Wissel:

OK and just real quick we got about a minute left how are we doing with our our king tides and our high waters?

Abby Pedigo:

It's been a little soggy.

Melissa Wissel:

I know we've had a lot just click reminding our listeners.

Abby Pedigo:

it's been a little soggy yeah it's been a little soggy around here just try to keep an eye on the tides look ahead and and try to plan your outings around those king tides. This past week was bad because we kind of had a nor'easter too the wind was on shore so so when that happens it really accelerates this king tides even more so but if you know there's standing water please don't drive through the standing water we've seen so many stalled out vehicles in the water. If you do have a vehicle that can travel through the water. Go nice and slow so you're not waking out your neighbors and the residents. We see that water splashing onto the to the home so please be mindful of your neighbors. And and and remember that a lot of that water is saltwater so if you are driving through it spray off your vehicles when you get home run through the car wash I went up to the car wash one day and it was like pouring down rain outside but I had just driven through the water and they were looking at me like I was crazy because I was going through the car wash in the rain but but had to had to spray off that salt yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Get that undercarriage treatment.

Melissa Wissel:

Well lots of information is this go around this week thanks so much for coming lots of great information thanks congratulations on the 100 years.

Abby Pedigo:

Anytime. Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

Next year you'll be back for the next campaign.

Abby Pedigo:

Awesome

Melissa Wisse:

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Narrator:

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