



NEWS RELEASE

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(Soldering Torch Sparks Residential Fire)

A homeowner replacing his own water heater sparked a one-alarm fire that damaged his Hillsboro home Wednesday afternoon. The fire at 132 SE 41st Ave was reported to 9-1-1 dispatchers at 3:36 pm. When the first Hillsboro Firefighters arrived from the Parkwood Station #5, they found residents outside waiving them in and smoke pouring from the crawl spaces of the home. Firefighters entered the crawl space and found active fire beneath the house. Crawling in the limited space with air packs on, they extinguished the flames in about 10-minutes. They spent another 25-minutes removing charred insulation and ensuring all embers were out . Twenty firefighters responded to the scene including an engine company from Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue. No one was injured. Hillsboro Police blocked Main Street on either side of SE 41st Avenue for safety reasons. The home is located at the corner of Main and SE 41st Ave.

Homeowner Don Branson, 58, told investigators he was installing a new water heater in his garage. Branson was using a propane torch to connect the water pipes when the flames erupted. Fire investigators say the most likely cause of the fire spreading through the home was the ignition of plastic-coated heating ductwork in the space just beyond where the water pipes entered the wall. Damage estimate may reach \$30,000. Fire damage was confined to the crawl spaces of the home. However, the entire home suffered moderate smoke damage. Branson and his two adult children will be staying with relatives until the home is habitable again.

Branson had no fire extinguisher nearby. "I plan to buy an extinguisher--a big one," he said, when interviewed by firefighters. Hillsboro Fire and Rescue reminds all homeowners who plan to use open flame devices to always have a fire extinguisher within reach. Fire extinguishers can be found at most home improvement retailers and even in larger grocery stores. For more fire and life safety information, visit: www.ci.hillsboro.or.us/fire or call 503-681-6166.

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Photo Caption: Tegen 1324.jpg

Hillsboro Fire Engineer Randy Tegen removes charred insulation from the crawl space of a Hillsboro home after the homeowner accidentally ignited plastic-coated heating ductwork with a propane torch.