

## POTTING SOIL FIRES



**Over the last few years, fire departments throughout North America have reported a higher than average number of fires caused by potting soil and/or peat moss.**

### **Some examples of large fires caused by potting soil catching fire:**

- Calgary – March 2010 – fire caused by a cigarette left smoldering in a flowerpot left 250 people displaced
- Edmonton – July 2014 – fire caused by a cigarette in a flower pot left 400 people displaced
- Edmonton – May 2015 – fire caused by carelessly disposing of cigarette in flowerpot left 155 people displaced
- Montreal – August 2016 – fire starting in a flowerpot left 30 people displaced
- Langley, BC – December 2016 – fire caused by a careless disposal of a cigarette butt left 100 people displaced

### **There are two main causes:**

1. Careless disposal of smoking materials
2. Spontaneous combustion

The majority of smokers today light up outside where there are often insufficient ashtrays or receptacles for cigarette butts. Many butt out in any available container, such as a patio planter.

There have also been reports of fires where potting soil has self-ignited. This can occur if a plastic planter is left in direct sun, neglected and allowed to completely dry out. Fire departments advise that the chance of this happening is relatively low, however, if a potted plant is allowed to dry out and something hot is placed in it, such as a cigarette, it will burn.

Many people think that they can safely butt out in a plant or flower pot, however, both the plants and soils contain chemicals that can ignite. A problem related to fertilizers in the soil is that they act as oxidizers that accelerate fires. Many potting soils on the market today contain less dirt and more organic substances that are flammable, such as shredded wood, bark, peat moss, styrofoam pellets and vermiculite.

### **Helpful prevention tips:**

- Provide smokers with a designated smoking area, and provide proper receptacles for cigarette disposal.
- Advise smokers not to use any pots containing potting soil as an ashtray.
- Maintain planters, keep plants fresh and watered and check them frequently in hot sunny dry weather.
- Discard any dead plants in planters.
- Do not keep potted plants near combustible materials.
- Do not store bags of potting soil in direct sunlight and/or near any combustible materials.
- Avoid plastic containers – use clay planter pots whenever possible, as they may keep potting soil fires better contained.

**BFL's Real Estate Team understands the risks faced by Corporations. In addition to protecting your investment, we offer guidance focused around claims prevention, coverage education and bylaw review to property managers, landlords and condominium boards.**

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