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FEBUARY 2026

2025 NORTH CAROLINA FIRE FATALITY REPORT

2025 Five-Year Analysis
(2021–2025)

OFFICE OF STATE FIRE MARSHAL
NC DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE

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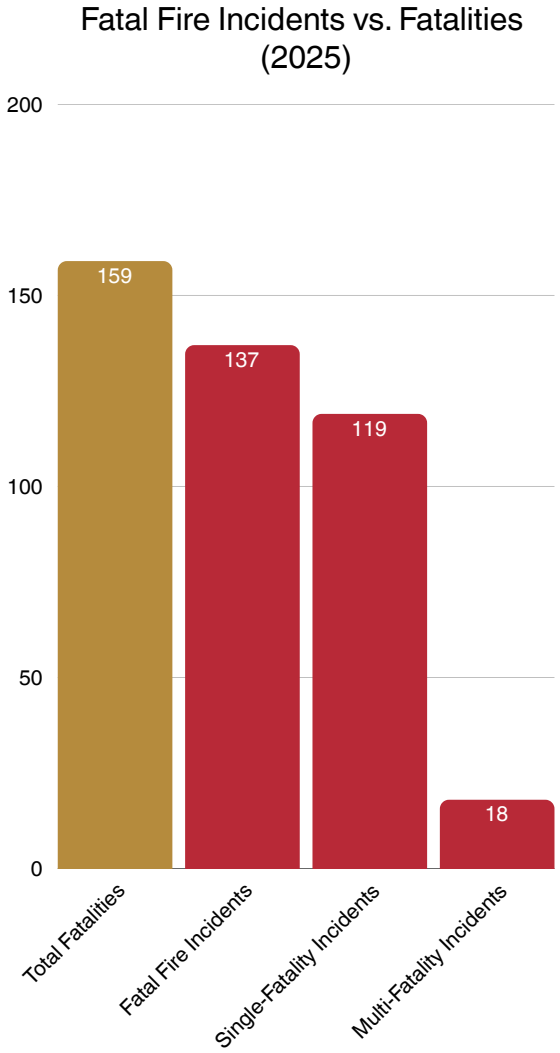
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM 2025

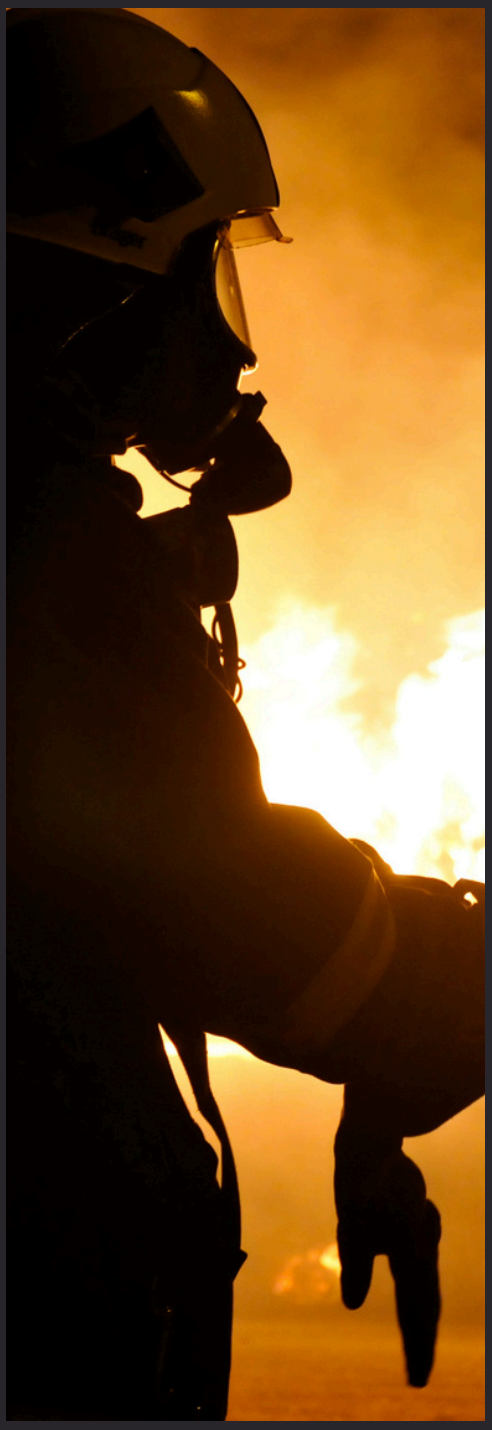
Fire-related fatalities remain a serious and largely preventable public safety issue in North Carolina. This report presents a detailed analysis of 2025 fire fatality data, supported by a five-year comparison (2021–2025) to provide context, identify trends, and guide prevention priorities.

In 2025, North Carolina recorded 137 fatal fire incidents resulting in 159 civilian fire deaths. While most fatal fires involved a single death, multi-fatality incidents accounted for a disproportionate share of loss of life. Eighteen multi-fatality incidents resulted in 40 deaths, representing 25.15% of all fatalities statewide.

- Older adults (65+) remain the most at-risk population.
- Residential fires dominate fatal incidents
- Early-morning hours carry the highest risk
- The absence of working smoke alarms is a recurring factor.

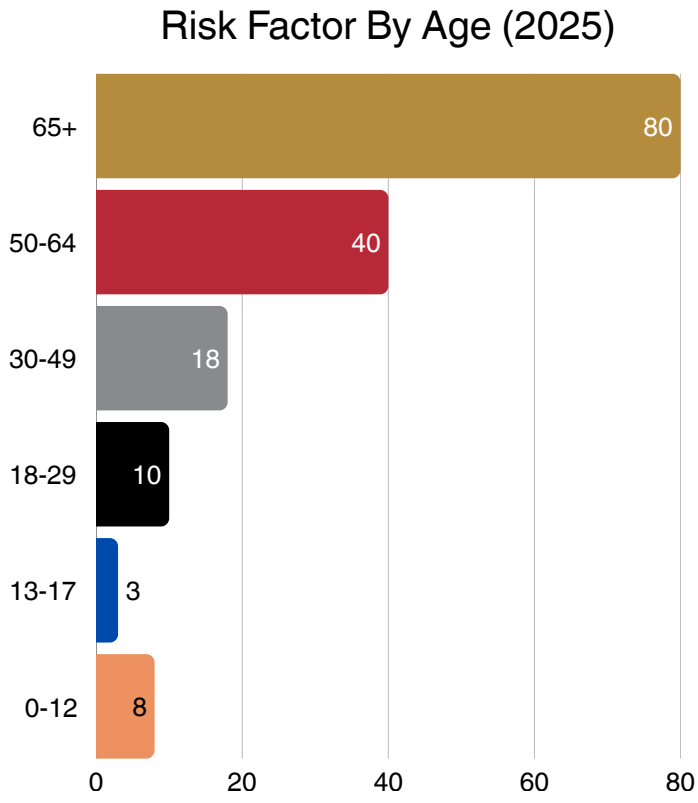


Long-term trends continue to show that older adults, residential fires, early-morning incidents, and the absence of working smoke alarms are the primary drivers of fire-related loss of life. The data clearly demonstrates that fire deaths are not evenly distributed across age groups, geography, or time of day—and that targeted, evidence-based prevention strategies can significantly reduce fatalities.



SECTION 1: 2025 FIRE FATALITY OVERVIEW

2025 at a Glance



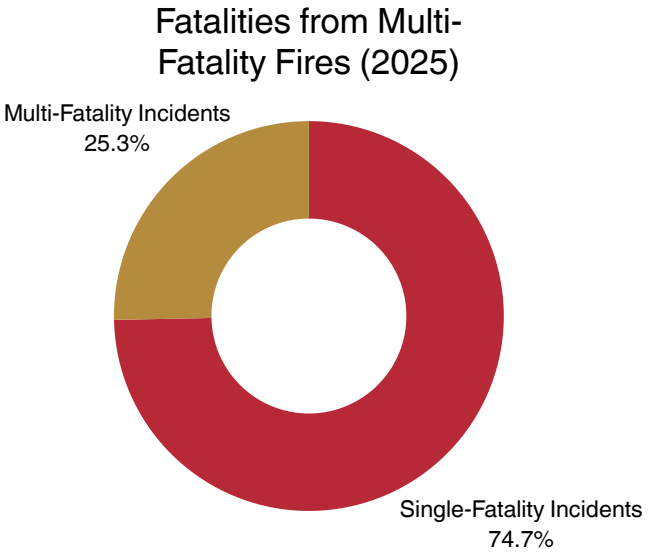
WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Fire fatality risk in 2025 was not evenly distributed across the population. Adults aged 65 and older accounted for 80 deaths (50.3%). Males represented 91 fatalities (57%), while females accounted for 68 deaths (43%) Older adults face increased risk due to factors such as reduced mobility, chronic health conditions, living alone, and heightened vulnerability during overnight fires. These risks are compounded in homes without confirmed working smoke alarms.

FATALITY INCIDENTS:

~51% Fatality Rate — For adults who are 65 and older

MALES Highest Deaths — Found in homes without smoke alarms



GEOGRAPHIC FATALITY DISTRIBUTION (2025)

In 2025, fire-related deaths were reported in 58 of North Carolina's 100 counties, while 42 counties reported no fire fatalities.
Most deaths occurred in a relatively small number of counties—typically those with larger populations or repeated fatal incidents over time. This uneven distribution shows that fire fatalities are not spread evenly across the state and highlights the importance of county-level prevention strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all statewide approach.

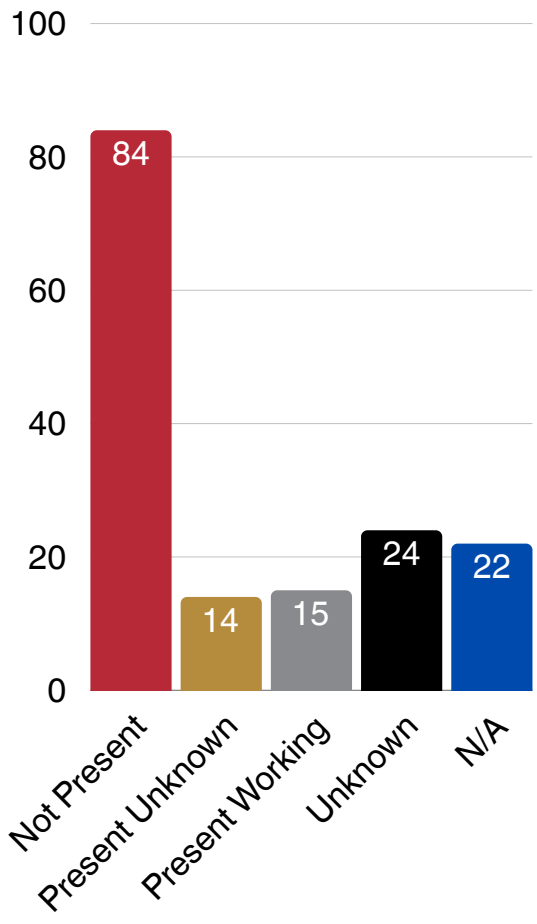
PREVENTION & RISK FACTORS

Fire fatality data continues to show a strong relationship between deaths and the absence of confirmed working smoke alarms:

- 84 fatalities (52.8%) occurred where alarms were not present or not working.
- 24 fatalities (15.1%) occurred where alarm status was unknown.
- Only 15 fatalities (9.4%) occurred where a working smoke alarm was confirmed.

Expanding smoke alarm installation, replacement, and verification programs remains the single most effective life-saving intervention to reduce fire deaths in North Carolina.

SMOKE ALARM STATUS (2025)

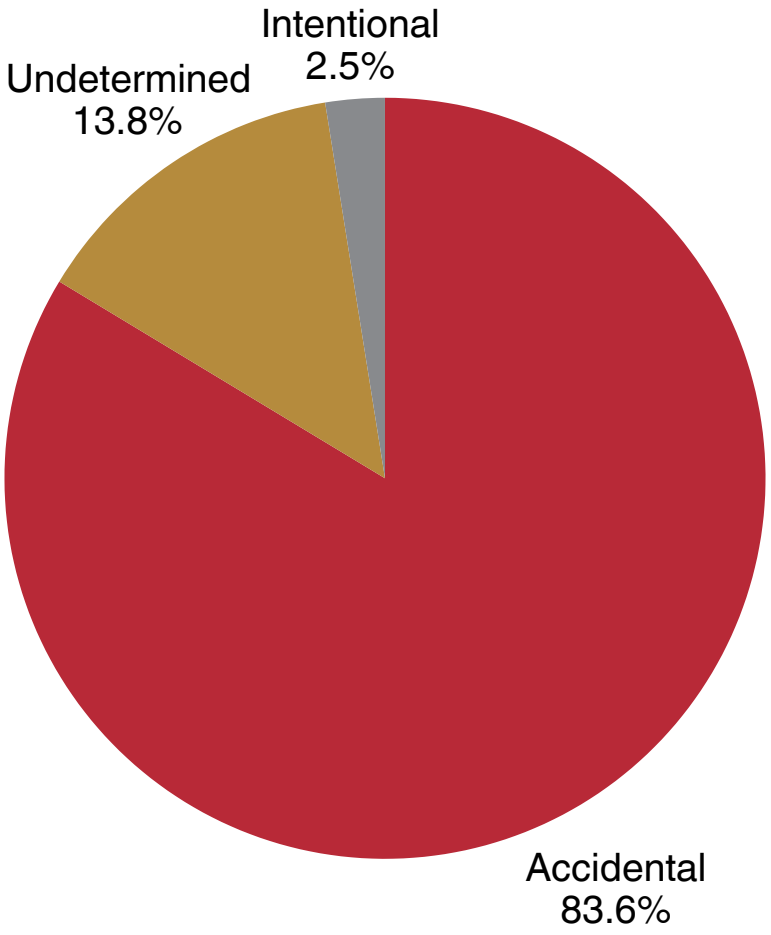


SECTION 2: FIRE CHARACTERISTICS & INVESTIGATION (2025)

Causes & Indicators

2.1 CAUSE CLASSIFICATION (2025)

The overwhelming majority of fatal fires were ruled accidental, indicating that most fire deaths occur during normal, everyday activities. Undetermined cases typically reflect situations where fires were discovered late, caused extensive damage, or lacked witnesses, limiting the ability to confirm a definitive cause.

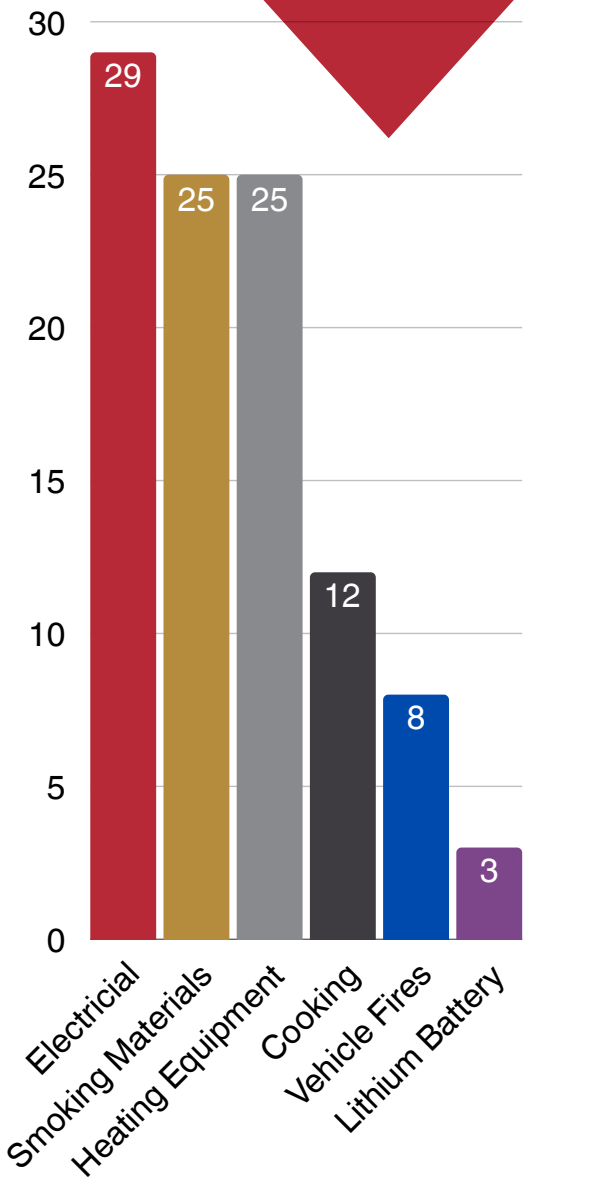


2.2 FIRE CAUSE / IGNITION SOURCE (2025 DETERMINATION CATEGORIES)

The most common known fire causes and contributing factors in 2025 included:

- Electrical: 29 fatalities
- Heating appliances: 25 fatalities
- Smoking materials: 25 fatalities
- Cooking: 12 fatalities
- Rubbish/trash fires: 11 fatalities
- Multiple possible causes: 11 fatalities
- Candle: 5 fatalities
- Vehicle fires: 8 fatalities
- Li-ion battery incidents: 3 fatalities
- Hot work: 2 fatalities
- Juvenile firesetting: 2 fatalities
- Gas explosion: 1 fatality
- Suicide-related fires: 3 fatalities
- Mass loss / structural failure: 7 fatalities
- N/A (cause not applicable/undetermined): 15 fatalities

These causes are closely associated with residential environments, especially during colder months and overnight hours when heating use increases and occupants are asleep.

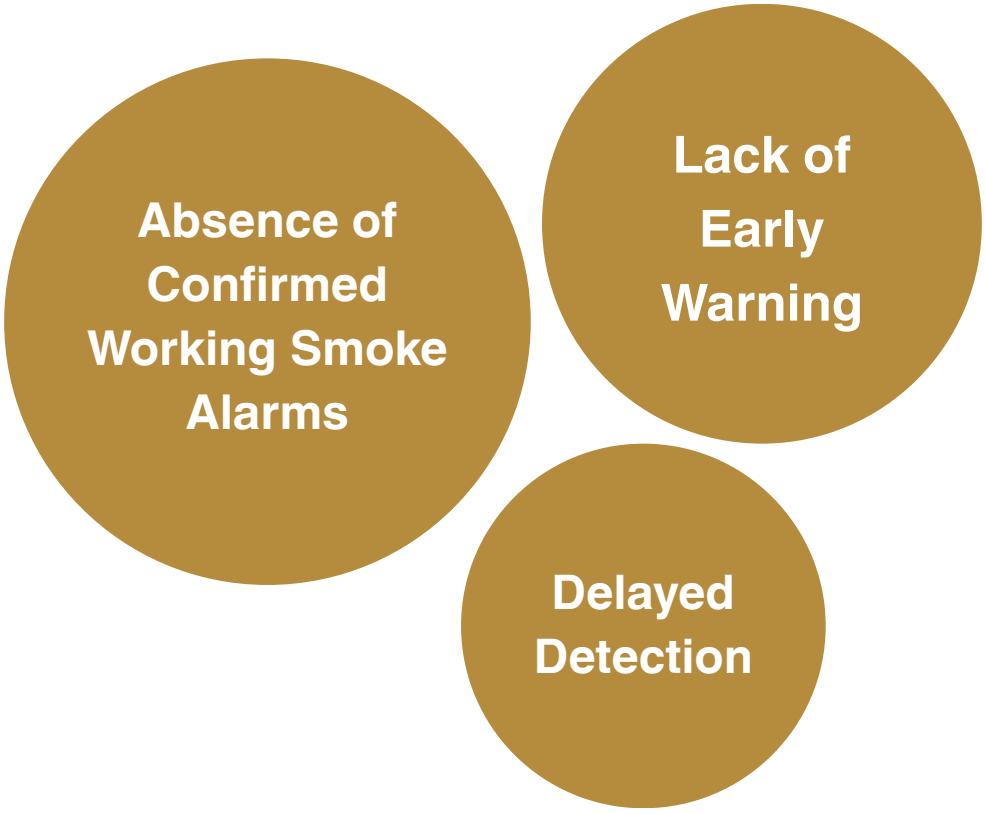


2.3 INCIDENT SEVERITY AND MULTI-FATALITY FIRES (2025)

Although most fatal fires involved a single death:

- 18 multi-fatality incidents occurred in 2025
- These incidents resulted in 40 deaths, accounting for 25.15% of all fatalities

Multi-fatality fires often indicate a convergence of high-risk factors, including:



These incidents represent the most severe failures of the fire safety system and should be a primary focus of prevention, investigation, and outreach efforts.

SECTION 3: CAUSE BY AGE, SEX & SMOKE ALARM STATUS

Causes of fatalities by age & demographic

3.1 CAUSE BY AGE GROUP

80 FATALITIES | 50.3%
HEATING, SMOKING-RELATED & ELECTRICAL FIRES

65+

40 FATALITIES | 25.2%
SIMILAR PATTERNS TO 65+, INDICATING EARLY ONSET OF ELEVATED RISK

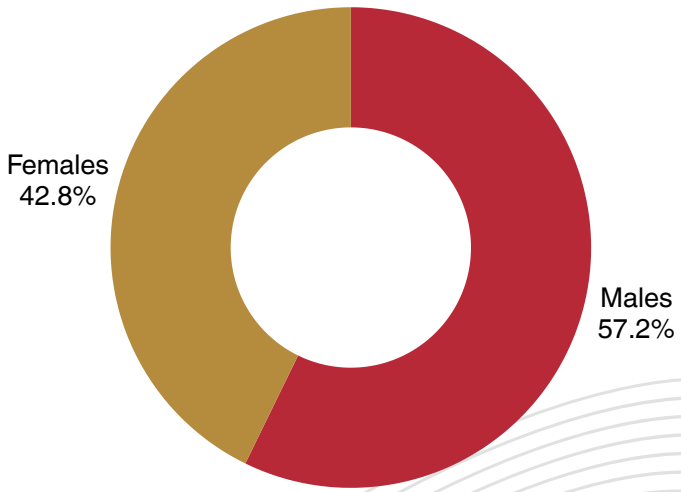
50-64

39 FATALITIES | 24.5%
LESS FREQUENT, MORE VARIED CAUSES (VEHICLE, COOKING, ELECTRICAL)

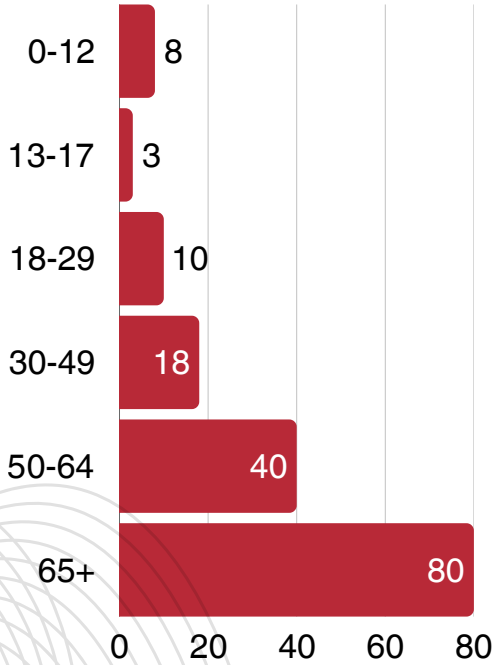
49 & UNDER

FATALITIES BY SEX

In 2025, there were 159 total fatalities:
Male: 91 fatalities | Female: 68 fatalities

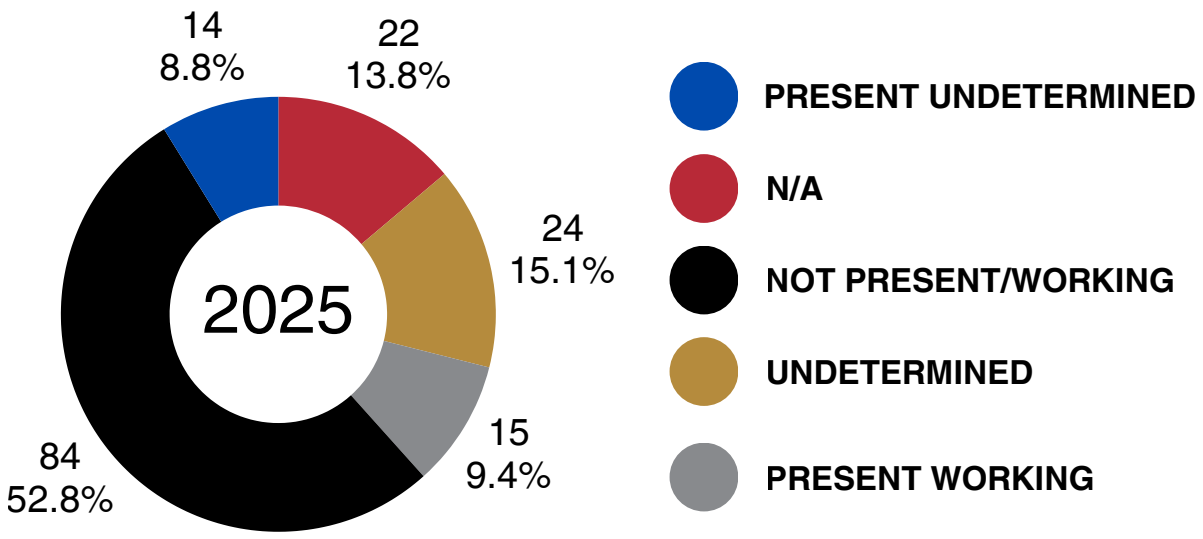


FATALITIES BY AGE



3.2 CAUSE BY SMOKE ALARM STATUS

Fatalities were highest where smoke alarms were missing or non-functional. Fatalities were significantly lower where alarms were confirmed to be working. Electrical, heating, and smoking-related fires were most deadly in homes without verified alarms.



The highest fatality risk profile occurs when older adults, residential fire causes, and missing or non-working smoke alarms intersect. This combination explains the majority of multi-fatality incidents and disproportionate loss of life in 2025.

SECTION 4: FATALITIES BY MONTH & TIME OF DAY (2025)

Incident Snapshot & Risk Levels

4.1 FATALITIES BY MONTH

71
TOTAL DURING PEAK MONTHS

15
TOTAL DURING LOW MONTHS

MONTHLY STATISTICS (2025)

In 2025, North Carolina recorded 159 total fire-related fatalities. The data shows clear seasonal variation:

Highest Fatality Months:
- December – 30 fatalities
- January – 27 fatalities
- March – 21 fatalities

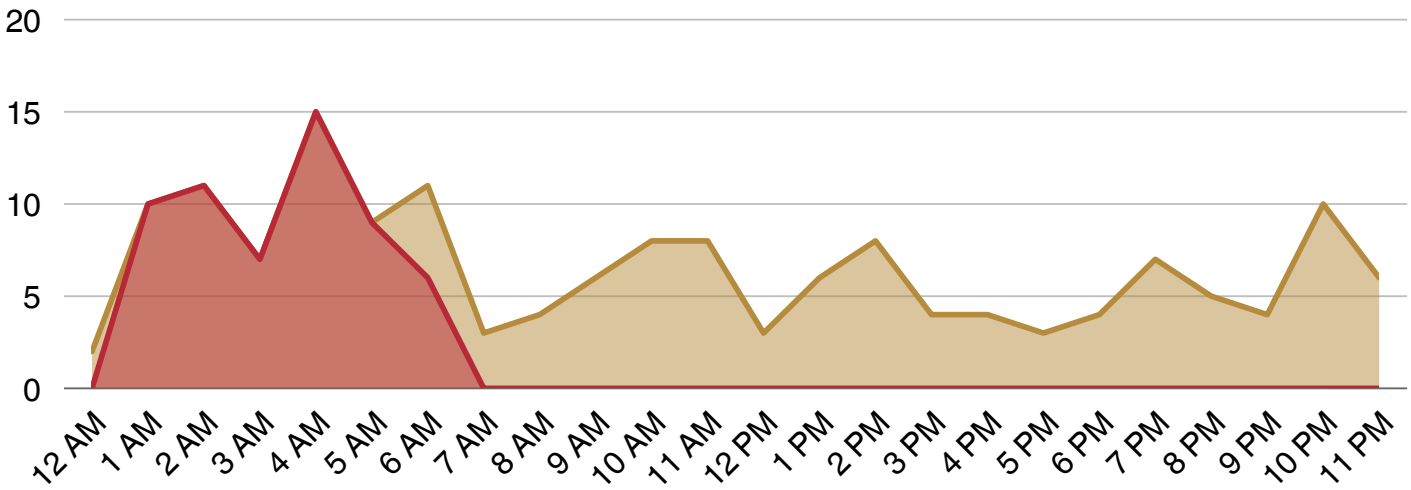
Lowest Fatality Months:
- June – 2 fatalities
- July – 6 fatalities
- September – 7 fatalities

Fatalities were most concentrated in the **winter** and **early spring** months, with another increase at the end of the year. This pattern reflects increased risk factors such as **heating use, holiday activities, and longer overnight hours.**

4.2 FATALITIES BY TIME OF DAY

STATISTICS OF HOURLY RISKS (2025)

In 2025, North Carolina recorded 159 total fire-related fatalities. The data shows clear seasonal variation. Overall, fatalities were most common during late-night and early-morning periods, highlighting the importance of working smoke alarms, early warning systems, and nighttime fire safety education.



RISK HIGHS/LOWS

Fire deaths in 2025 were heavily concentrated during overnight and early-morning hours, when people are typically asleep and less likely to detect fire early.

12-3 A.M.
ELEVATED RISK

4-7 A.M.
HIGHEST FATALITY RISK

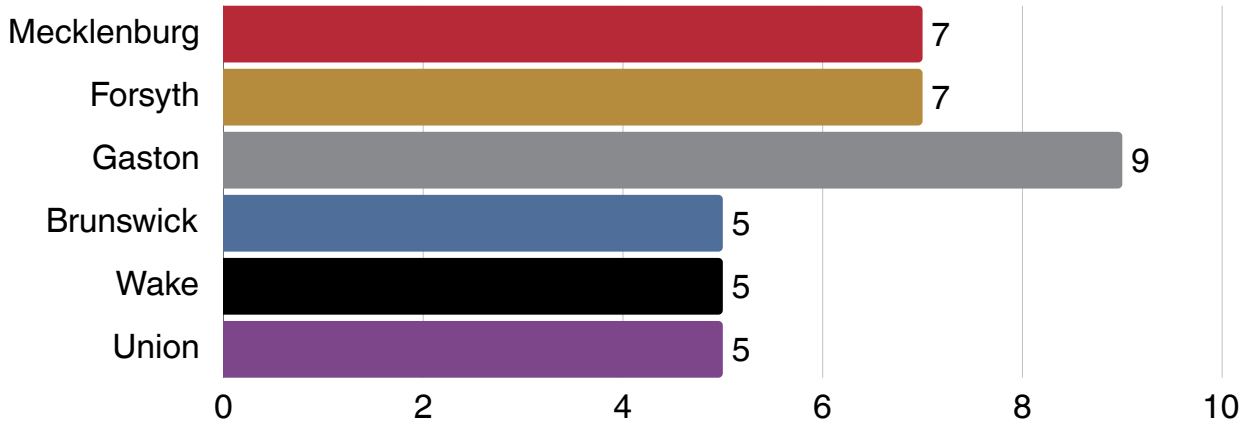
4-7 P.M.
LOWEST RISK

SECTION 5: GEOGRAPHICAL SNAPSHOT (2025)

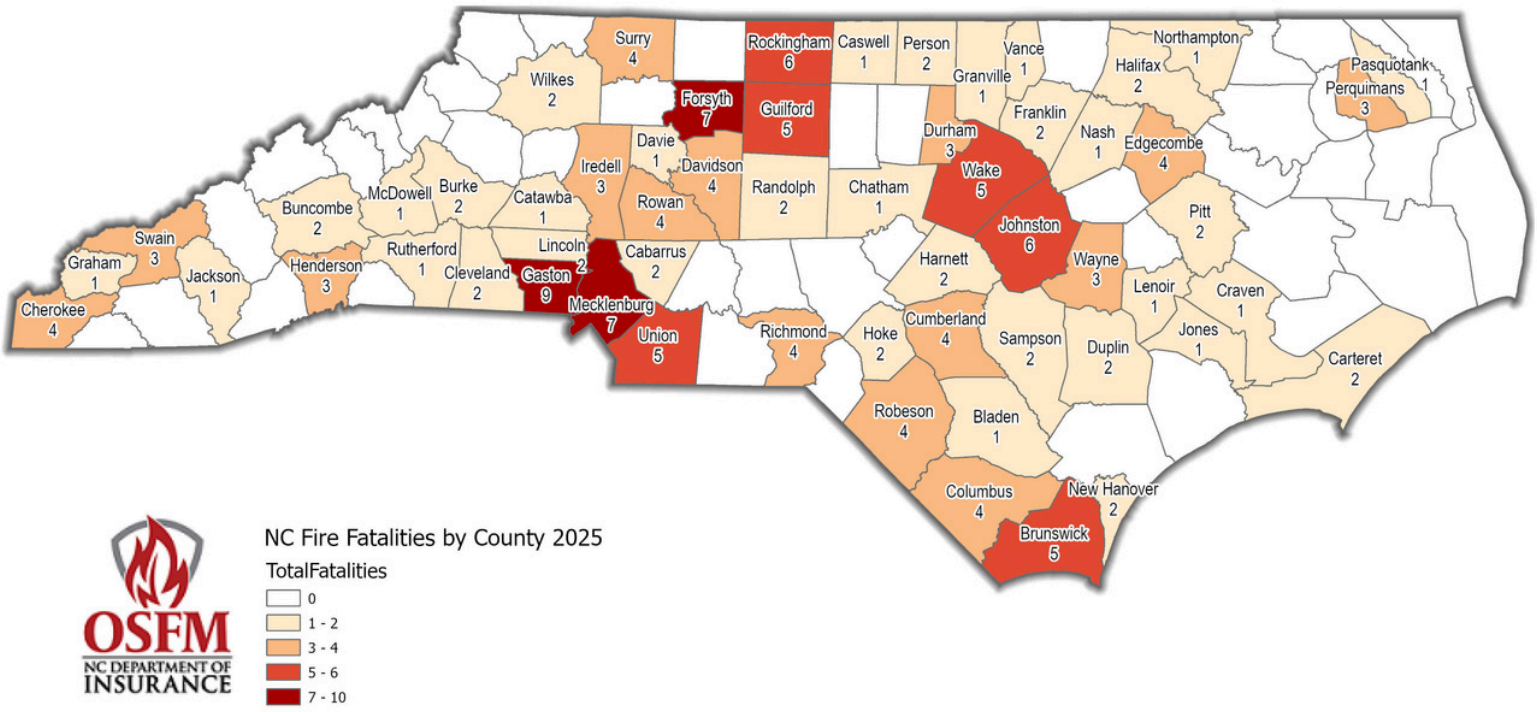
Alarm presence & statistic breakdown

PER-COUNTY FATALITY RATES:

In 2025, fire-related fatalities were reported across 58 of North Carolina's 100 counties, while 42 counties recorded zero fire deaths.



FATALITIES REPORTED FOR 58 OUT OF 100 COUNTRIES



42%

Many rural counties reported no fatalities in 2025, including Clay, Hyde, Martin, Mitchell, Transylvania, and Tyrrell, among others.

58%

Fatalities were concentrated in a relatively small number of jurisdictions —typically those with larger populations or repeated fatal incidents during the year.

IMPORTANT:

This geographic pattern reinforces the importance of targeted, county-level prevention strategies focused on communities with repeated loss of life rather than a uniform statewide approach.

SECTION 6: FIVE-YEAR CONTEXT (2021-2025)

Per-Capita Fatality Rates & Highest Totaled Fatalities 2021-2025

6.1 (2021-2025) SNAPSHOT

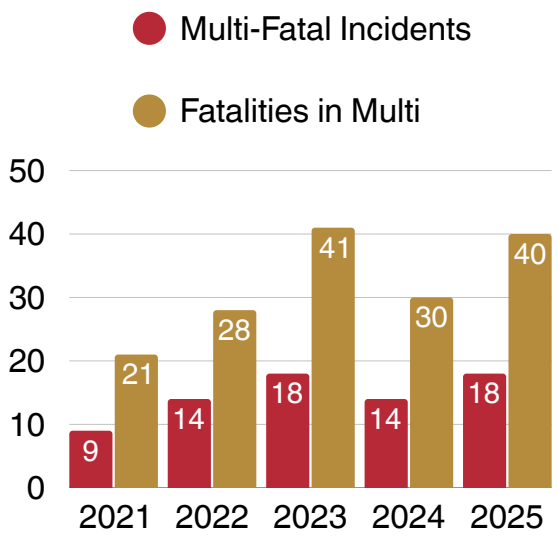
623
FATAL FIRE INCIDENTS

714
FATALITIES

1.15
AVERAGE FATALITIES PER INCIDENT

MULTI-FATALITY INCIDENTS:

Within five years, there have been 72 incidents (11.6% of all fatalities), leading to 160 deaths (22.4% of all fatalities)

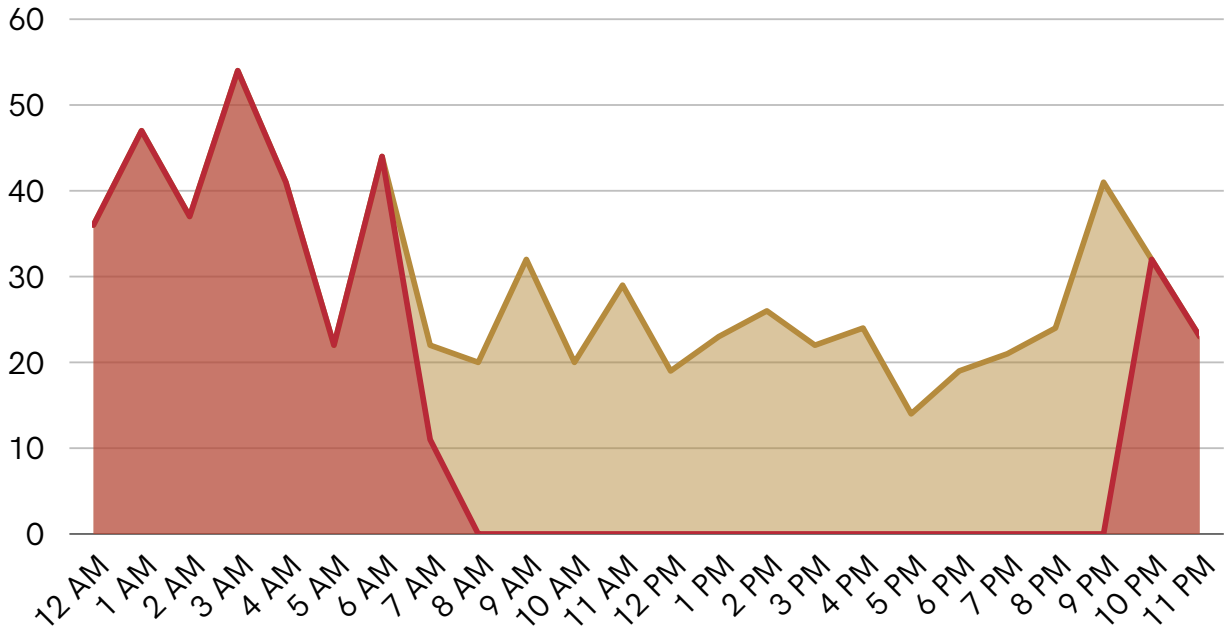


FIVE-YEAR TRENDS

- An increasing share of fatalities occurring in multi-fatality incidents after 2021
- Adults aged 65 and older consistently represent the highest-risk group
- A rising share of female fatalities over time
- Early-morning fires (3:00–6:00 AM) show the highest fatality risk per incident

These patterns mirror 2025 findings and reinforce the persistence of structural risk factors.

6.2 TIME OF DAY ANALYSIS (2021-2025)



HIGHEST FIVE YEAR HOURS

- 3:00 AM – 54 fatalities
- 1:00 AM – 47 fatalities
- 6:00 AM – 44 fatalities
- 9:00 PM – 41 fatalities
- 4:00 AM – 41 fatalities

LOWEST FIVE YEAR HOURS

- 5:00 PM – 14 fatalities
- 12:00 PM – 19 fatalities
- 6:00 PM – 19 fatalities
- 8:00 AM – 20 fatalities
- Unknown - 4 Fatalities

OVERNIGHT HOURS ARE THE MOST DANGEROUS. BOTH 2025 AND FIVE-YEAR DATA SHOW FATALITIES PEAKING BETWEEN 1:00 AM AND 4:00 AM, WITH ELEVATED RISK CONTINUING INTO LATE EVENING.

6.3 MONTH ANALYSIS (2021-2025)

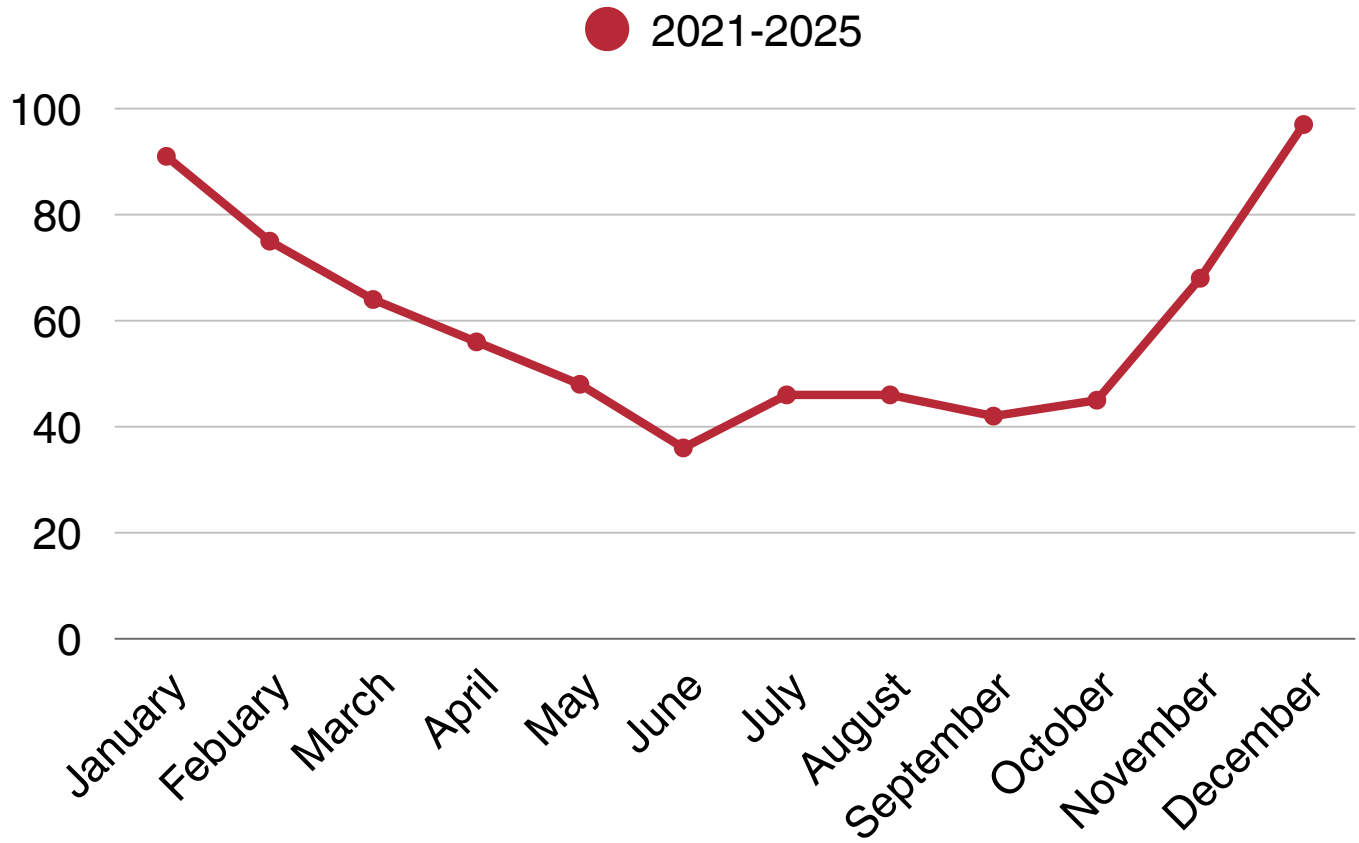
HIGHEST FIVE YEAR MONTHS

- December – 97 fatalities
- January – 91 fatalities
- November – 68 fatalities

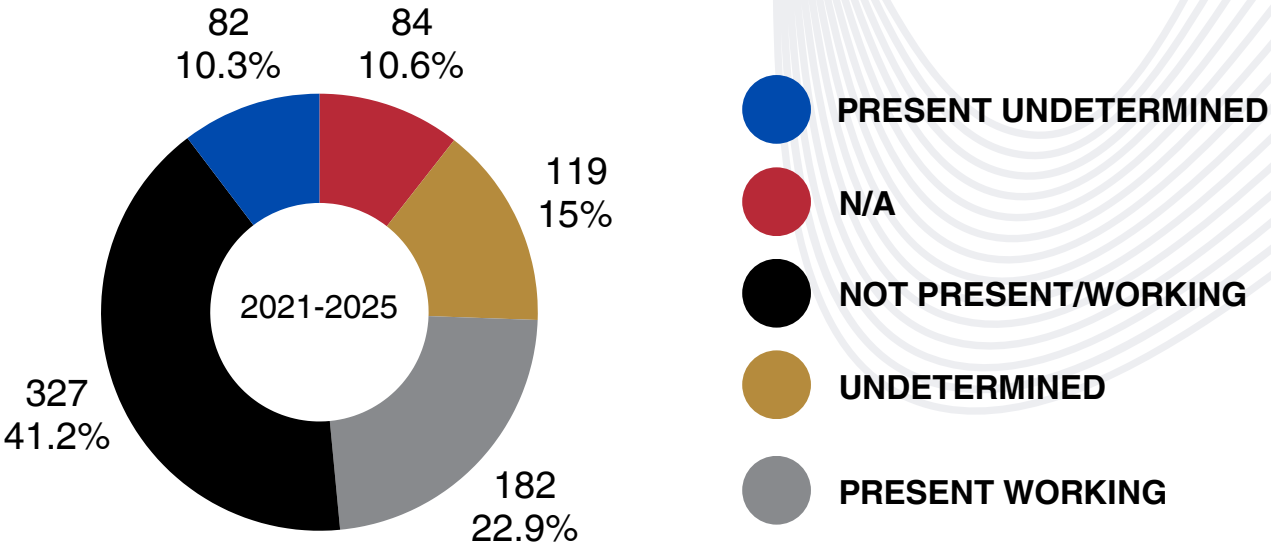
LOWEST FIVE YEAR MONTHS

- June – 36 fatalities
- September – 42 fatalities
- October – 45 fatalities

THE DATA CONFIRMS A CONSISTENT SEASONAL PATTERN, WITH FATALITIES PEAKING IN LATE FALL AND WINTER AND DECLINING DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS.



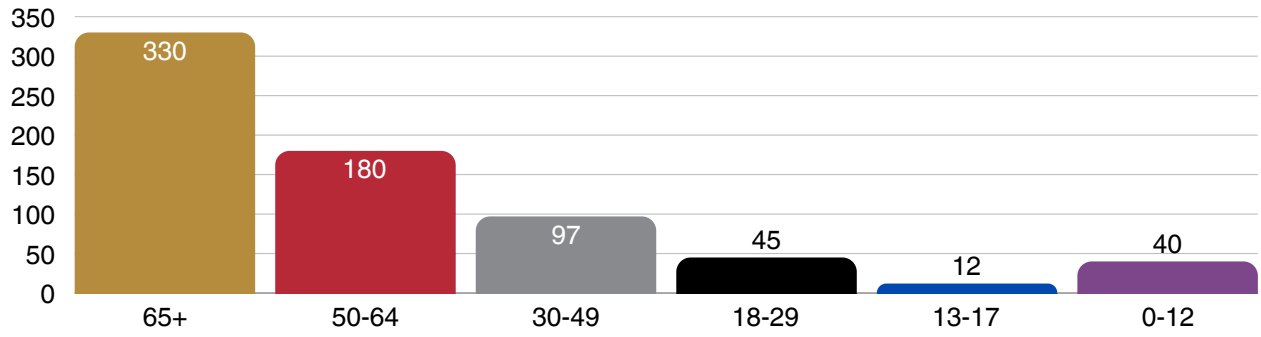
6.4 SMOKE ALARM FINDINGS (2021-2025)



AT LEAST 45.8% OF ALL FIRE DEATHS INVOLVED NO ALARM OR A NON-WORKING ALARM. THE LARGE PROPORTION OF UNKNOWN AND UNDETERMINED ALARM STATUS ALSO HIGHLIGHTS A PERSISTENT DATA QUALITY GAP THAT MAY MASK THE TRUE EXTENT OF SMOKE ALARM DEFICIENCIES STATEWIDE.

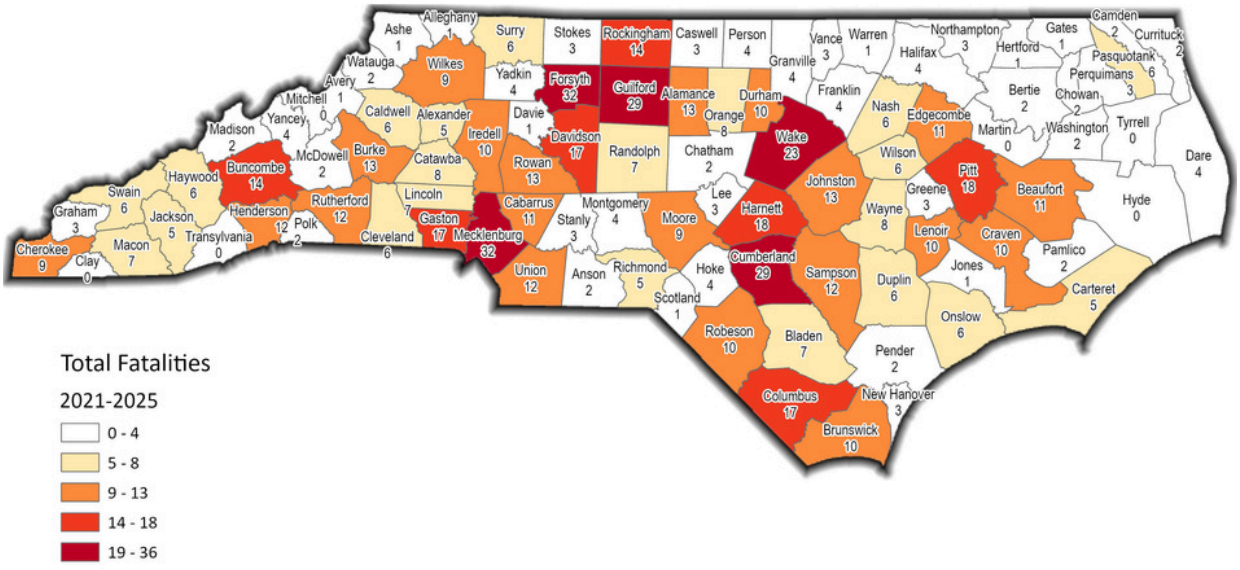
RISK FACTOR BY AGE (2021-2025)

Across a five-year period.

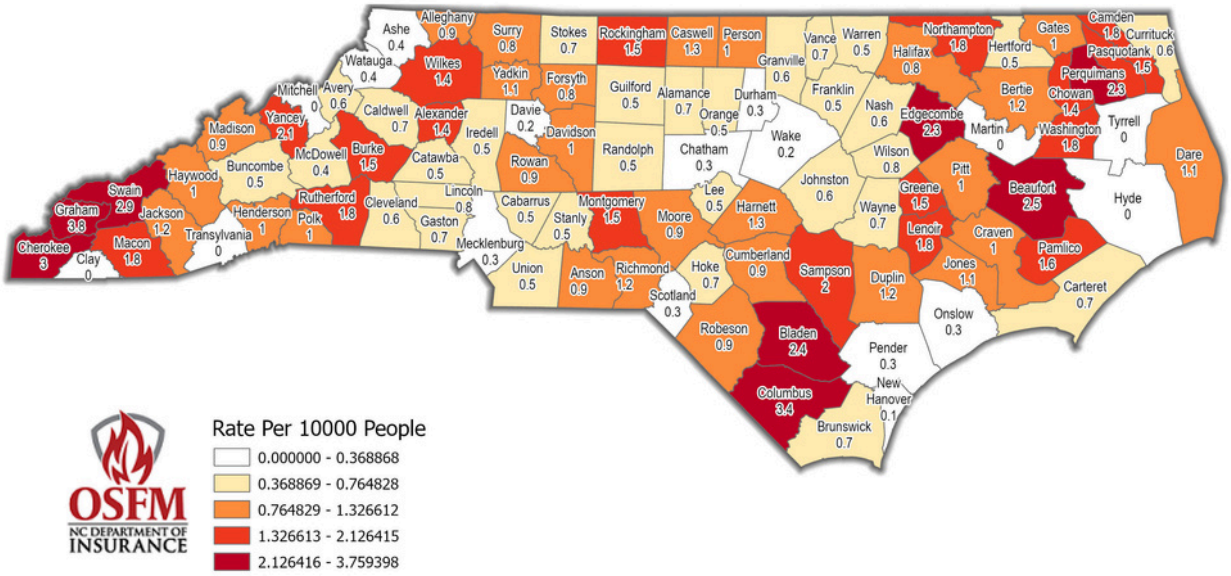


6.5 CIVILIAN FIRE FATALITIES (2021-2025)

NORTH CAROLINA CIVILIAN FIRE FATALITIES 2021-2025
5 YEAR TOTALS



NORTH CAROLINA CIVILIAN FIRE FATALITIES 2021-2025
5 YEAR AVERAGE RATE BY COUNTY PER 10,000 PEOPLE



SECTION 7: STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Outlook for 2026

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR 2026?

- Fire fatalities in North Carolina are largely accidental and preventable.
- Older adults (65+) consistently represent the highest-risk population.
- Fatalities are geographically concentrated, not evenly distributed statewide.
- Multi-fatality incidents, while relatively rare, drive a disproportionate share of deaths.
- Working smoke alarms remain the single most effective life-saving tool.

The data shows that fire deaths are driven by a predictable set of risk factors: residential settings, overnight hours, older occupants, and missing or non-functional smoke alarms. These patterns have remained consistent over time and provide clear direction for prevention efforts.

Recommended Actions:

1. ***Prioritize*** Senior-Focused Fire Safety Programs.
2. ***Expand*** Smoke Alarm Installation, Replacement & Verification.
3. ***Direct*** Prevention Funding Strategically.
4. ***Strengthen*** Fatal Fire Data Quality.
5. ***Align*** public messaging with evidence-based risks.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 data reinforces long-standing trends observed over the past five years: fire fatalities in North Carolina are driven by preventable residential fires, disproportionately affect older adults, and are strongly associated with the absence of working smoke alarms. While multi-fatality fires remain uncommon, they continue to account for a significant share of deaths and warrant focused prevention, investigation, and outreach.

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