What's Up, College Station? Transcript
Season 4, Episode 46

Grace Hallowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today I'm joined by Stu the Fire guy. Hi, Stu.

Stuart Marrs: Good to be here.

Grace Hallowell: I am excited to have you back. We are going into the holiday season, and it seems like almost every major holiday includes fire of some kind—cooking, fireworks, what have you. Today we have some Thanksgiving cooking safety tips, as well as tips on what to do in an emergency situation where you need medical attention. For those who do not know who you are, can you introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what you do?

Stuart Marrs: Sure. My name is Stuart Marrs. I'm a captain with the College Station Fire Department, and I've been with the department for almost 19 years.

Grace Hallowell: Quite a long time now. I'm sure you've seen a lot, especially across many holiday seasons. Is there a memory from past Thanksgivings that sticks out to you from calls you've received while you've been with the city?

Stuart Marrs: Not necessarily a specific call on a holiday, but because firefighters work at the station on holidays, we don't get those days off. We're at work. We cook a nice meal, and some of our family can come up to the station and celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner with us. Those are the memories I have—cooking a big meal as a crew, and then people's families coming up to share the meal at the fire station. Those are always fun days.

Grace Hallowell: It sounds like a lot of fun. What is your favorite part about your job?

Stuart Marrs: My favorite part about the job is coming to talk to you and spreading the message of fire safety at the holidays.

Grace Hallowell: What changes for you during this time of year? Are the calls different, or do they stay the same throughout the year?

Stuart Marrs: Because College Station is such a mix of year-round residents and students, call types change throughout the year. We expect different calls during football season when so many people are in town, and different types of calls around holiday weekends. When students leave town, things slow down for us. This time of year, the weather's changing, people are running their heaters for the first time, and the holidays are approaching. We anticipate typical calls around Thanksgiving and the holidays—a lot of

cooking fires and cooking injuries. That's what we're here to talk about today so we can avoid those.

Grace Hallowell: Thanksgiving is one of, if not the busiest cooking holiday. What are some of the most common fire hazards that the fire department sees during the holiday season?

Stuart Marrs: It's not necessarily that you're going to burn your house to the ground on Thanksgiving. The big risk is minor cuts and minor burns from so many people cooking and being crowded in the kitchen—using the oven, fighting for oven time, putting multiple things in the oven, using all four stovetop burners, and using the microwave. We see a lot of minor injuries where people touch something hot because someone else heated it up, or they reach back and get a dull knife. Nothing is more dangerous than a dull knife. People end up cutting themselves, and we see many minor injuries around and on Thanksgiving Day because of all the kitchen activity.

Grace Hallowell: What are some steps that families can take to keep their kitchen safe while preparing their Thanksgiving meal?

Stuart Marrs: Keep the kids out of the kitchen. A good idea is to create an activity to occupy the children and have another sober adult manage them away from the kitchen, so children aren't running underfoot while hot things are moved from the oven to the countertop or around knives. Having them in a separate room or outside eliminates distractions and prevents them from touching hot items or sharp objects.

Grace Hallowell: And pets too.

Stuart Marrs: Keep the kids out, and pets too. Nothing is worse than tripping over the dog when taking the green bean casserole out of the oven, so keep dogs put away or out playing with the children. Another big factor is unattended cooking. We typically talk about that with grilling, because it's tempting to put food on the grill and walk inside to prep more food before checking on it. It's just as important to monitor food on the stovetop or in the oven. People often start cooking, the doorbell rings when a guest arrives, they go to greet them, and no one is watching what's frying on the stovetop. If you have to step away, either turn off the heat until you return or hand the cooking utensil to someone else and tell them to watch the food while you answer the door or make a phone call. Having a slotted spoon in hand helps them stay focused, and if distracted, they'll remember they need to stir the broth. Make sure someone is always on duty monitoring the kitchen. If something starts burning or gets out of control, you need to act quickly so you don't have to call us.

Grace Hallowell: We are happy to come out and help you, but we do not want that to be the first option. What should someone do if a grease fire breaks out on their stovetop, and what should they never do?

Stuart Marrs: If a grease fire is burning on your stovetop, turn off the heat—turn off the gas or electricity and the burner under the fire—and cover it with a lid. Do not try to pick it up and move it, and do not throw water on it or put it in the sink under running water. Water and grease do not mix, so water will spread the fire. You want to cool it by turning off the burner and smother it with a lid. If the fire is in your oven, leave it in the oven. Do not try to pull it out, take it outside, or put it in the sink. Ovens are designed for hot things, so leave the door closed. It will smoke up the house, but leaving the door shut helps smother the fire. Opening the oven door introduces oxygen and makes the fire burn more. Keep the oven door closed, turn it off, and let it cool down.

Grace Hallowell: What precautions should people take if they choose to deep fry their turkeys? It's a popular way to make a turkey, but it can be dangerous if you've never done it before.

Stuart Marrs: If this is your first year deep frying a turkey, don't do it. Instead of an oil fryer, use an air fryer. Air fryers are much safer, cleaner, and less expensive, and you don't have to deal with disposing of large amounts of oil. If you are set on oil-frying a turkey without experience, follow specific instructions and recipes online. Measure the turkey to determine the right amount of oil and use a completely thawed turkey. Putting a frozen turkey into hot oil causes a boil-over, which leads to major fires. Always fry outside on a non-combustible surface like concrete or gravel—never on a wooden deck or right next to your house. Whether using oil or an air fryer, have someone in charge monitoring it at all times.

Grace Hallowell: Beyond the kitchen, what are some other common Thanksgiving fire hazards people should watch for?

Stuart Marrs: If you're hosting overnight guests, test all your smoke detectors. If you're visiting family—such as your parents—test their smoke detectors before going to bed that night. People often forget to check their own detectors, and older parents shouldn't be climbing a stepladder to change batteries, so checking and replacing batteries during Thanksgiving week is a helpful practice.

Grace Hallowell: The holidays often bring family members of different ages together under one roof. What medical emergencies should people be prepared for during Thanksgiving gatherings?

Stuart Marrs: When my family hosts for the big meal, relatives arrive a few days early and stay through the weekend. We always keep a first aid kit out and handy and let the other adults and parents know where it is, so if a child scrapes a knee, people can quickly find a bandage. I keep ice packs in the freezer ready for bumps and bruises, along with bandages and ointment, because minor injuries happen when kids are playing. Keep a first aid kit ready and keep a fire extinguisher out in plain sight rather than pushed under the kitchen

sink where no one knows about it. It may not match holiday decor, but seeing it beforehand helps people remember where it is during an emergency.

Grace Hallowell: How can someone recognize when a medical situation requires an immediate call to 911 rather than waiting to see if symptoms improve, such as with a burn?

Stuart Marrs: A burn larger than the size of your hand requires medical attention, depending on depth. Burns that cause blistering right away should be seen immediately. Other warning signs for medical emergencies include a change in mental status—not acting the way they usually act—skin color changes like looking pale or blue, and fainting. Anyone who faints needs to be evaluated.

Grace Hallowell: Sometimes people aren't sure whether to call 911, or the person experiencing the issue doesn't want to make a fuss. What advice do you give someone who is unsure whether to call for medical services?

Stuart Marrs: In College Station, if you call 911 for a medical emergency, we send an ambulance and likely a fire truck, since fire trucks have paramedics on board. Having us check you out doesn't mean we're going to force you into the ambulance and take you to the hospital. We can evaluate you, check your blood pressure and pulse, take your history, and talk with you. If you decide you don't need to go to the hospital with us, you don't have to. You can speak with a paramedic to get an outside opinion beyond family members and then decide whether to go to the hospital.

Grace Hallowell: If a listener remembers just three safety tips for Thanksgiving, what should they be?

Stuart Marrs: Number one: keep the kids out of the kitchen. Number two: have a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher out and ready. Number three: check your smoke detectors, especially if you're hosting overnight guests.

Grace Hallowell: My grandma always had a rule of no kids in the kitchen, and I follow that rule myself when cooking or hosting so it stays safe. Where can residents find additional fire prevention and emergency preparedness resources from the College Station Fire Department?

Stuart Marrs: Online, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) offers many holiday-specific resources, including cooking safety infographics that are easy to review, remember, and share with family.

Grace Hallowell: Before we go, we have a lightning round themed to this week's topic. Are you ready? What is your favorite Thanksgiving side dish?

Stuart Marrs: I like a plain salad—like a regular or tomato salad—over heavy casseroles and sweet dishes.

Grace Hallowell: You need that freshness with a heavy meal. What is one kitchen safety rule you wish everybody followed?

Stuart Marrs: Keep the kids out of the kitchen unless they're old enough to help safely rather than play while you're cooking.

Grace Hallowell: What is the most common cooking mistake people make during the holidays?

Stuart Marrs: My pet peeve is carving the turkey at the dining table while everyone sits waiting. Carve it earlier in the kitchen into bite-sized pieces instead of trying to be like Clark Griswold at the table.

Grace Hallowell: What is one thing every household should have on hand in case of an emergency?

Stuart Marrs: A fire extinguisher.

Grace Hallowell: Finally, what is your favorite part of serving the City of College Station community during the holiday season?

Stuart Marrs: For Christmas, there's a family that drives around and visits the fire station each year to drop off small gifts for the firefighters. Seeing the community support us like that is something I love.

Grace Hallowell: Thank you so much for being here today, and that's what's up.