

## “KEEPING PACE” – 22

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### MICROWAVE OVEN FIRE:

The photograph below shows a microwave oven in Cleveland in which the upstairs neighbor found three potatoes burning. She carried them outside and no further fire ensued, but the smoke damage was considerable. After disassembling the microwave and examining its wiring, I operated it and found it to function properly. The microwave heated a cup of water to boiling in about two minutes; there was nothing wrong with it. Its owner was an older lady on medication who put the potatoes in the microwave, set the time, and then went into her bedroom to lie down. What she had done was to accidentally dial way too much time into the digital timer. After cooking for a considerable time, the potatoes ignited.



P.A.C.E. has investigated three other microwave oven fires. In those fires, usually a meat sandwich ignited when too much time was accidentally set on the microwave, although of course, no one admitted to it. In every case, the microwave operated properly afterward during P.A.C.E. testing.

### COOKING FIRE:

The photograph below shows the area of origin of a fire in a double-wide mobile home in West Virginia. When the adjusters called us with this assignment, they stated that they are pretty good fire investigators themselves, and they insisted that a short circuit in the refrigerator cord had caused this fire. When I called the lady to arrange for an inspection, because of my experience with cooking fires, I asked her whether there had been any

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grease on the range. She denied it. Upon arriving at the scene, I asked her again. Again she denied it. Then I disassembled the range burner controls and found the control for the burner which I felt was the point of origin to be stuck in the “High” position. Upon showing that to the lady, she started to sob.



### CONSIDER ONLY THE EVIDENCE:

The photograph below shows a gas range burner control stuck in the “High” position by plastic which had melted and run down over the control during the fire. The hardened plastic still holds this control fast, in the “High” position. The range owner and her adult daughter admit they were present about 45 minutes prior to this fire, and the daughter admits she once had a cooking fire in her own apartment. But they are still insisting to the adjuster at the time of this writing that they had no cooking materials on the stove and that they didn’t touch the stove. I have found that because of trauma and for other reasons, people often honestly do not remember exactly what they did just prior to a fire or an accident. Their memories are often not reliable. In these cases, it is best to consider only the evidence.



Frederick F. Franklin, P.E.