

Lessons Learned

Microwave Fire Hazard



What Happened?

WCMC Security called Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) to report a **code red**, triggered by a smoke alarm activation at 1300 York Avenue.

A staff member was heating up food in a microwave oven and left the area unattended. The microwave also happened to be placed inside a small closet with a smoke detector, which is an unapproved location for microwave use. The food overheated and burnt the container, causing smoke to be released from the microwave oven and activating the smoke alarm.

Staff became aware of the situation upon fire alarm system activation, but some did not follow proper R.A.C.E. procedure.

Fortunately, no injuries resulted from this incident.

Why Did This Happen?

- **The microwave was left unattended while in operation.**
- The microwave was located in a small enclosed space, out of sight, making it more likely for an issue (such as smoke generation) to go undetected until fire alarm activation. Had the microwave been placed in a visible location, signs of overheating may have been recognized prior to the alarm activation.



Microwave inside closet with a smoke detector- an unapproved location for Microwave use at WCM.

Lessons Learned

- During all fire alarm activations, all building occupants must **follow the RACE Procedure** outlined in the Building-Specific Fire Safety and Evacuation Procedures of the [Fire Safety and Emergency Action Plan](#).
- **Do not place microwave ovens inside closets.** If you are unsure about microwave placement, you can contact EHS for an assessment of the proposed location.
- **Microwave ovens should never be left unsupervised.** This will prevent overheating and smoke generation.
- To prevent reoccurrence of similar incidents with potentially more serious consequences, it is important for WCMC employees to keep in mind the following [Microwave Use Safety Tips from the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#).



Smoke detector similar to those found at WCM.

