

Fire Prevention – How to Stay Safe

Fires and burns cause more than 4,000 deaths and more than 50,000 hospitalizations every year. Winter is an especially dangerous time, as space heaters, fireplaces and candles get more use in the home. It is no surprise that most fires in the home occur between December and February. However, you might be surprised at how easy it is to reduce the risk of fire in your home.

Most fatal fires in the home happen while people are sleeping. One of the most important steps you can take to protect your family against fire is to install smoke alarms and keep them in good working order. Smoke alarms are available at most home and hardware stores and often cost \$10 or less. Check with your fire department to see if they give out and install free smoke alarms.

Install smoke alarms outside every bedroom or any area where someone sleeps. Be sure there is at least one alarm on every level of your home or at each end of a mobile home. Where you install your alarms, and how you maintain them, is important too.

- Place smoke alarms away from the kitchen and bathroom. False alarms can occur while cooking or even showering.
- Test smoke alarms every month by pushing the test button.
- Change the batteries when they get low, or at least once a year such as when you change your clocks back in the fall.
- Replace smoke alarms every 10 years.
- Never paint a smoke alarm.
- Clean smoke alarms monthly by dusting or vacuuming.
- Smoke alarms with a flashing light and an alarm should be used in homes with hard-of-hearing or deaf children or adults.

Once you've got your smoke alarms installed and working, take a careful look at each room of your home. Use the following checklists and safety tips to reduce the risk of fire:

- Make an escape plan. Practice it every 6 months. Every member of the family should know at least two exits from each room and where to meet outside.
- Inspect and replace any electrical cords that are worn, frayed, or damaged. Never overload outlets. Avoid running electrical cords under carpet or furniture as they can overheat and start a fire.
- Make sure doors and windows are easy to open.
- Automatic home fire sprinkler systems are affordable and practical for many homes.

Wood stoves usually cannot be safely installed in mobile homes. If one is present, it should be inspected by the local fire department to be sure it is safely vented.

Avoid using alternative heating sources such as kerosene heaters and electric space heaters. If they must be used, keep them away from clothing, bedding and curtains, and unplug them at night. If kerosene heaters must be used, make sure that you have adequate ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

Bedrooms

Check the labels of your child's pajamas. Children should always wear flame-retardant and/or close-fitting sleepwear.

If a bedroom is on an upper floor, make sure there is a safe way to reach the ground, such as a noncombustible escape ladder.

In the event of a fire, test any closed doors with the back of your hand for heat. Do not open the door if you feel heat or see smoke. Close all doors as you leave each room to keep the fire from spreading.

Never smoke in bed or when you are drowsy or have been drinking. Tobacco and smoking products, matches and lighters are the most common cause of fatal fires in the home.

Living and Family Rooms

Make sure all matches, lighters and ashtrays are out of your child's sight and reach. Better yet, keep them in a locked cabinet.

Use large, deep ashtrays that won't tip over and empty them often. Fill ashtrays with water before dumping ashes in the wastebasket.

Give space heaters plenty of space. Keep heaters at least 3 feet from anything that might burn, like clothes, curtains and furniture. Always turn space heaters off and unplug them when you go to bed or leave the home.

Have fireplaces and chimneys cleaned and inspected once a year.

Use a metal screen or glass doors in front of the fireplace.

Never leave children alone in a room with candles, heaters or with a burning fireplace.

Kitchen

- Keep your stove and oven clean and free of anything that could catch fire. Do not place pot holders, curtains or towels near the burners.
- Install a portable fire extinguisher in the kitchen, high on a wall and near an exit. (Choose a multipurpose, dry chemical extinguisher). Adults should know how to use it properly when the fire is small and contained, such as in a trash can. Call your fire department for information on how to use fire extinguishers.

Never leave cooking food unattended.

Never pour water on a grease fire.

If a fire starts in your oven, keep the oven door closed and call the fire department.

Garage, Storage Area and Basement

- Have your furnace inspected at least once a year.
- Do not store anything near a heater or furnace. Remove trash from the home.
- Clean your dryer vent after every use. Lint buildup can start a fire.
- Check to make sure paint and other flammable liquids are stored in their original containers, with tight-fitting lids. Store them in a locked cabinet if possible, out of your child's reach, and away from appliances, heaters, pilot lights and other sources of heat or flame.
- Never use flammable liquids near a gas water heater.
- Store gasoline, propane and kerosene outside the home in a shed or detached garage. Keep them tightly sealed and labeled in approved safety containers.

Gasoline should be used only as a motor fuel, never as a cleaning agent.

Never smoke near flammable liquids.

Outdoors

- Move barbecue grills away from trees, bushes, shrubs or anything that could catch fire. *Never* use grills indoors, on a porch, or on a balcony.
- Place a barrier around open fires, fire pits or campfires. *Never* leave a child alone around the fire. Always be sure to put the fire out completely before leaving or going to sleep.

Do not start lawnmowers, snowblowers or motorcycles near gasoline fumes. Let small motors cool off before adding fuel.

Be very careful with barbecue grills. Never use gasoline to start the fire. Do not add charcoal lighter fluid once the fire has started.