

Home Fire Prevention

Avoidable Tragedy

Every year in this country about 3,500 people die in fires at home; about 20,000 are injured; and billions of dollars worth of property are destroyed in house fires. Most of these tragedies are preventable.

There is no such thing as a fireproof home, but simple maintenance, a few new skills, and some inexpensive equipment can make your home more fire-resistant.

If Fire Breaks Out

If a fire starts in your home, you must be able to respond. You cannot assume that everyone in the family will know what to do unless you have planned for it.

Be sure. Create a safe escape plan and practice it at least twice a year. Include these points:

- Identify two exits from each room.
- Choose a meeting place a short but safe distance from your home.
- When the smoke alarm sounds, immediately head for the exits. Do not stop to investigate or to gather possessions.
- Crawl with your head 12-24 inches above the ground to stay under the smoke. Move quickly.
- Test doors for heat using the back of your hand. If you feel any heat, don't open the door. Use your backup exit.
- If doors are cool, open them carefully, checking for smoke and flames.
- Go directly to the safe meeting place.
- Once you are out of a burning building, never go back inside for any reason!
- One person should go to a neighbor's house to call the fire department.

A Fire Safety Tour

Look carefully through your house for fire hazards you may have overlooked. It only takes a bit of organization to get rid of many of these hazards. Others require a small expense. Whatever the cost or effort, preventing a fire in your home is worth it.

Kitchen

Unsafe cooking is the leading cause of home fires and burn injuries.

- Keep cooking surfaces clean.
- Hang curtains, potholders, and dishtowels at least three feet from the stove.
- Cook with the lowest effective heat.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Supervise children in the kitchen at all times.
- Unplug appliances when not in use.

Living Room or Den

Careless habits can cause tragedies.

- If people smoke in the house, empty ashtrays often, but only when the contents are cool.
- Avoid extension cords. Never run them under rugs or where they may be pinched.

- Have chimneys inspected each year. Burn only dry wood or manufactured logs. Use a spark-containing fire screen or glass shield.
- Inspect space heaters for wear and tear. Check their emergency shut-off features. Use only the recommended fuel.
- Keep combustibles, children, and pets at least 3 feet from heat sources.
- Hang holiday decorations far from heat sources.

Basement, Workroom, or Attic

Out of sight, out of mind? Take a closer look.

- Strap water heater to the wall, 18" off the floor. Have gas shut-off in easy reach.
- Have the furnace inspected annually.
- Store flammable liquids far from heat.
- Do not store large amounts of unused paper or cloth items.
- Oily rags can ignite without warning. Wash them in detergent and discard.

Bedrooms

Half of house fire deaths are caused by fires that begin between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

- Never smoke in bed.
- Sleep with bedroom doors closed to slow the fire's progress toward you.
- Install smoke alarms right outside sleeping areas.
- Consider escape ladders for second floor bedroom windows.

Roof

- Choose Class A-rated, fire-resistant roofing.
- Install spark guards around chimneys.

The House as a Whole

Heating and electrical fires are common.

- Install at least one smoke alarm on each level of your home.
- Maintain smoke alarms with monthly tests and new batteries twice a year.
- Have a licensed electrician check the house's wiring if lights flicker, fuses blow, or sparks fly from outlets or appliances.
- Do not overload electrical outlets.
- Check cords and plugs for wear.
- Windows and doors must be easy to open from the inside. Security bars must open easily without a key or other tools.
- Keep extinguishers labeled 2A-1 OBC in the kitchen and workroom, and near fireplaces.
- Keep matches and lighters from children.

Landscaping

- In wildfire-prone areas, use low plants near the house. Plant trees and shrubs at least 10 feet away.
- Plant groups of trees and shrubs 10 to 15 feet from each other.
- Ask a local nursery for advice on fire-resistant plants that do well in your area.