

Fire Prevention Around the Home

Each year, more than 4,000 Americans die and more than 25,000 are injured in fires, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Direct property loss due to fires is estimated at \$8.6 billion annually.

Preventative measures are the best way to avoid the risk of a fire in your home. Some things that you can do to minimize the risk of fire include:

- **Install smoke detectors.** Make certain you have smoke detectors on every level of your residence (check on local laws regarding the number and placement of detectors in a residence). Recommended locations include:
 - Outside bedrooms on the ceiling or high on the wall (4-12 inches from the ceiling)
 - At the top of open stairwells or at the bottom of enclosed stairs
 - Near (but not in) the kitchen

Test and clean smoke alarms once a month and replace batteries at least once a year. Replace smoke alarms every ten years.

- **Take precautions with flammable liquids.** Flammable liquids (such as gasoline or lighter fluid) should be stored in approved containers in well-ventilated storage areas. Rags or materials that have been soaked in these or other flammable liquids (such as some cleaning solvents) should be disposed of in an outdoor metal container.



- **Observe fireplace safety precautions.** If you have a fireplace, make certain you use a safety screen whenever you build a fire. Clean ashes out of the hearth between each use and store them in an outdoor metal container. Make certain your chimney is clear of debris before using the fireplace, and don't build a fire if there are branches hanging above or around the chimney top or if you do not have a spark arrester on the chimney.
- **Alternate heating sources.** Check with your local fire department on their recommendations for using alternate heaters (such as portable gas fireplaces) in your community. Make certain that heaters are placed at least three feet away from any flammable materials, and that the surrounding walls and floor are properly insulated. Use the type of fuel designated for your unit and follow all manufacturer instructions.
- **Candles.** Place lit candles in a high, stable place where pets and children

cannot get to them. Keep open flames away from walls, furniture, drapes, and other flammable items.

- **Smoking materials.** If you smoke in your home, keep matches and lighters in a place where children cannot reach. Make certain smoking materials are fully extinguished, and douse the remnants with water before throwing them away. Never smoke in bed or when drowsy or under the influence of alcohol or medication.
- **Electrical wiring.** Several precautions can be taken to prevent electrical fires. These include:
 - If you have any electrical glitches in your house (such as lights flickering for no reason), have an electrician check for possible problems.
 - Make sure insulation does not touch bare electrical wiring.
 - Inspect cords for frayed or exposed wires or loose plugs, and throw away anything that might be a problem or have it professionally repaired.
 - Make sure outlets have cover plates and no exposed wiring.
 - Make sure electrical cords and stereo wires do not run under rugs, over nails, or through high-traffic areas.

- Do not overload outlets or power strips. Avoid using extension cords whenever possible.

Other Fire Precautions

- Clean out storage areas. Do not let old newspapers and magazines and other clutter accumulate.
- Install fire extinguishers in your residence and teach family members how to use them. Check with your local fire department for guidelines on the appropriate type of extinguishers to purchase.
- If you own your home, consider installing an automatic fire sprinkler system.
- Ask your local fire department to inspect your residence for fire safety and prevention suggestions.
- Sleep with bedroom doors closed. In the event of a fire, this will slow down its progress and give you more time to evacuate.

Creating a Fire Escape Plan

In the event of a fire, it's important to have a family escape plan in place. This plan should outline routes that family members should take and designate a meeting place that everyone should go to (for instance, "meet next to the mailbox") so that you can confirm that the entire family has escaped from the house. If you have your local fire department inspect your home for fire hazards, ask about recommended escape routes

