

Home Fire Safety

U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

Introduction

The United States has one of the highest fire death and injury rates in the world. Fire -- in the form of flames and smoke -- is the second leading cause of accidental death in the home.

More than 4,000 people die each year in home fires. Every year, there are more than 500,000 residential fires serious enough to be reported to fire departments. More than 90 percent of residential fire deaths and injuries result from fires in one and two family houses and apartments. Property losses exceed 4 billion dollars annually, and the long term emotional damage to victims and their loved ones is incalculable.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has targeted the principal consumer products associated with fires, namely home heating devices, upholstered furniture, bedding, cigarette lighters, matches, and wearing apparel. The Commission is participating in a special Congressionally authorized study of cigarette-ignited fires, which cause more deaths than any other kind of fire. The Commission continues to push for extensive use of smoke detectors. With the help of concerned consumers, the number of residential fires has declined about 30 percent since 1980.

The CPSC is fulfilling its role to make products inherently more fire safe. We recognize that much more can be done to cut down on the needlessly high and tragic fire toll by an alert and informed public. Many of the injuries associated with flammable products result from hazards that are overlooked. Fire experts agree that one key to fewer fires is a greater awareness of how accidents can be prevented. By spotting these hazards and taking some simple precautions, many fires and fire-related injuries can be prevented.

Use this checklist as a safety guide to spot possible fire safety problems which may be present in your home. It is a first step in reducing the risk of fire. Check YES or NO to answer each question. If you check NO to any question, the potential hazard should be corrected to avoid the risk of injury or death.

How safe is your home from fire?

Cooking Equipment

Cooking equipment is estimated to be associated with more than 100,000 fires annually, and almost 400 deaths, and 5,000 injuries. Gas cooking equipment accounts for about 30,000 fires, and electric cooking equipment for about 55,000 fires.

Recommendations:

- Never place or store pot holders, plastic utensils, towels and other non-cooking equipment on or near the range because these items can be ignited.
- Roll up or fasten long loose sleeves with pins or elastic bands while cooking. Do not reach across a range while cooking. Long loose sleeves are more likely to catch on fire than are short sleeves. Long loose sleeves are also more apt to catch on pot handles, overturning pots and pans and cause scalds.



- Do not place candy or cookies over top of ranges. This will reduce the attraction kids may have for climbing on cooking equipment, thus reducing the possibility of their clothing catching fire.
- Keep constant vigilance on any cooking that is require above the "keep warm" setting.

Cigarette Lighters and Matches

Each year more than 200 deaths are associated with fires statreted by cigarette lighters. About two thirds of these result from children playing with lighters. Most of the victims are under five years old.

**Danger —
Children and Lighters**



**KEEP CIGARETTE LIGHTERS AWAY
FROM YOUNG CHILDREN**

Recommendations:

- Keep lighters and matches out of sight and out of the reach of children. Children as young as two years old are capable of lighting cigarette lighters and matches.

- Never encourage or allow a child to play with a lighter or to think of it as a toy. Do not use it as a source of amusement for a child. Once their curiosity is aroused, children may seek out a lighter and try to light it.
- Always check to see that cigarettes are extinguished before emptying ashtrays. Stubs that are still burning can ignite trash.

Materials That Burn

Your home is filled with materials and products that will burn if ignited. Upholstered furniture, clothing, drapery fabrics, and liquids such as gasoline and volatile solvents are involved in many injury-causing fires each year. Most of these fires could be prevented.

Upholstered Furniture

In 1989, there were 18,600 residential fires associated with upholstered furniture; about 900 people lost their lives. About one half of these fires were caused by smoking materials. Property losses amounted to over \$ 100 million from fires started by cigarette ignition of upholstered furniture.

Mattresses and Bedding

Smoldering fires in mattresses and bedding materials caused by cigarettes are a major cause of deaths in residential fires. In 1989 over 35,000 mattress/bedding fires caused about 700 deaths.

Flammable Liquids

One of the major causes of household fires is flammable liquids. These include gasoline, acetone benzene, lacquer thinner, alcohol, turpentine, contact cements, paint thinner, kerosene, and charcoal lighter fluid. The most dangerous of all is gasoline. Take extra precautions in storing and using flammable liquids, such as gasoline, paint thinners, etc. They produce invisible explosive vapors that can ignite by a small spark at considerable distances from the flammable substance. Store outside the house.

Early Warning and Escape

Even when you have complied with every item in this Home Fire Safety Checklist, you still need to have a plan for early warning and escape in case a fire does occur.

Many fire deaths and fire injuries are actually caused by smoke and gases. Victims inhale smoke and poisonous gases that rise ahead of the flames. Survival depends on being warned as early as possible and having an escape plan.

You should be able to respond "yes" to the following statements.

Smoke Detectors

- | | Yes | No |
|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. At least one smoke detector is located on every floor of my home. | ___ | ___ |

2. Smoke detectors are placed near bedrooms, either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall. ___ ___
3. Smoke detectors are tested according to manufacturer's instructions on a regular basis (at least once a month) and are kept in working condition at all times. ___ ___
4. Batteries are replaced according to manufacturer's instructions, at least annually. ___ ___
5. Batteries are never disconnected. ___ ___
6. The detector has a distinct warning signal that can be heard whether asleep or awake. ___ ___

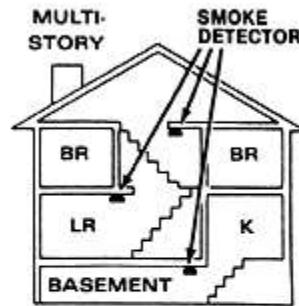
TEST YOUR DETECTOR MONTHLY

Beep!

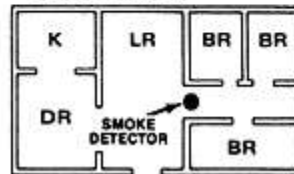


Follow manufacturer's directions for testing the detector.

PLACE ONE DETECTOR ON EVERY FLOOR



SINGLE LEVEL



Make sure detectors are placed either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall. Locate smoke detectors away from air vents or registers; high air flow or "dead" spots are to be avoided.

Recommendations:

- Purchase a smoke detector if you do not have one. Smoke detectors are inexpensive and are required by law in many localities. Check local codes and regulations before you buy your smoke detector because some codes require specific types of detectors. They provide an early warning which is critical because the longer the delay, the deadlier the consequences.
- Read the instructions that come with the detector for advice on the best place to install it. As a minimum detectors should be located near bedrooms and one on every floor.

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for proper maintenance. Smoke detectors can save lives, but only if properly installed and maintained.
- Never disconnect a detector. Consider relocating the detector rather than disconnecting it if it is subject to nuisance alarms, e.g. from cooking.
- Replace the battery annually, or when a "chirping" sound is heard.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions about cleaning your detector. Excessive dust, grease or other material in the detector may cause it to operate abnormally. Vacuum the grill work of your detector.

Escape Plan

Planning ahead, rehearsing, thinking, and acting clearly are keys to surviving a fire. How prepared are you?

You should be able to respond "yes" to the following statements.

	Yes	No
1. The family has an escape plan and an alternate escape plan.	___	___
2. Escape routes and plans are rehearsed periodically.	___	___
3. The escape plan includes choosing a place safely outside the house where the family can meet to be sure everyone got out safely.	___	___
4. At least two exits from each part of the house are established.	___	___
5. The fire department number is posted on every telephone.	___	___

Recommendations:

Establish advanced family planning for escape. It is an important partner with smoke detectors and it will prepare you for a fire emergency.

Include small children as a part of the discussion and rehearsal. It is especially important to make sure they understand that they must escape; they can't hide from fire under a bed or in a closet.

Your life and that of your family can be saved by foresight, planning, discussing and rehearsal.

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