

According to the National Fire Protection Association,

- In 2003, 80% of fires in the United States occurred in the home, resulting in 3,925 fire deaths.
- In the U.S., someone dies from a home fire roughly every 134 minutes.
- In Canada, someone is fatally injured in a home fire roughly every 31 hours.

Roughly half of all home fire deaths in the U.S. resulted from fires that were reported between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. But only one-quarter of home fires occur between those hours.

- Although children five and under make up about 9% of the country's population, they accounted for 17% of the home fire deaths.
- Smoking was the leading cause of home fire deaths overall, but in the months of December, January and February, smoking and heating equipment caused similar shares of fire deaths.
- Every 20 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the nation.

With these startling statistics in mind, here are some safety tips for you:

SMOKE DETECTORS

Smoke is responsible for three out of four deaths.

- Install smoke detectors on every level of your home and outside of sleeping areas.
- Test every detector at least once a month. [See your instruction book for the location of the test button.]
- Keep smoke detectors dust free. Replace batteries with new ones at least once a year, or sooner if the detector makes a chirping sound.
- If you have a smoke detector directly wired into your electrical system, be sure that the little signal light is blinking periodically. This tells you that the alarm is active.
- Inexpensive smoke detectors are available for the hearing impaired.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

They remain your best bet if you're on the spot when a fire begins.

- Fire extinguishers should be mounted in the kitchen, garage, and workshop.
- Purchase an ABC type extinguisher for extinguishing all types of fires.
- Learn how to use your fire extinguisher before there is an emergency.
- Remember, use an extinguisher on small fires only. If there is a large fire, get out immediately and call 911 from another location.

THINKING AHEAD: Your Exit Plan

As with other things, the best motto is, "Be Prepared."

- Prepare a floor plan of your home showing at least two ways out of each room.
- Sleep with your bedroom door closed. In the event of fire, it helps to hold back heat and smoke. But if a door feels hot, do not open it; escape through another door or window.
- Easy-to-use window escape ladders are available through many catalogues and outlet stores. For instance, First Alert sells one for around \$90.
- Agree on a fixed location out-of-doors where family members are to gather for a head count.
- Stay together away from the fire. Call 911 from another location. Make certain that no one goes back inside the burning building.
- Check corridors and stairways to make sure they are free of obstructions and combustibles.
- To help cut down on the need for an emergency exit in the first place, clear all unnecessary items from the attic, basement, garage, and closets.

FIREPLACE

Remember, you're deliberately bringing fire into your home; respect it.

- Use a fireplace screen to prevent sparks from flying.
- Don't store newspapers, kindling, or matches near the fireplace or have an exposed rug or wooden floor right in front of the fireplace.
- Have your chimney inspected by a professional prior to the start of every heating season and cleaned to remove combustible creosote build-up if necessary.
- Install a chimney spark arrester to prevent roof fires.
- When lighting a gas fireplace, strike your match first, then turn on the gas.

FURNACE/SPACE HEATERS

Used improperly, a space heater can be the most dangerous appliance in your house.

- Install and maintain heating equipment correctly. Have your furnace inspected by a professional prior to the start of every heating season .
- Don't store newspapers, rags, or other combustible materials near a furnace, hot water heater, space heater, etc.
- Don't leave space heaters operating when you're not in the room.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from anything that might burn, including the wall.
- Don't use extension cords with electrical space heaters. The high amount of current they require could melt the cord and start a fire.
- When lighting a gas space heater, strike your match first, then turn on the gas.
- Never use a gas range as a substitute for a furnace or space heater.

CLOTHES DRYER

Under some circumstances, dangerous heat can build up in a dryer.

- Never leave home with the clothes dryer running.
- Dryers must be vented to the outside, not into a wall or attic.
- Clean the lint screen frequently to keep the airway clear.

Never put in synthetic fabrics, plastic, rubber, or foam because they retain heat.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Electricity, the silent servant, can become a silent assassin.

- It is better not to use extension cords. If you feel you must use one, make sure that it is not frayed or worn. Do not run it under a rug or twist it around a nail or hook.
- Never overload a socket. In particular, the use of "octopus" outlets, outlet extensions that accommodate several plugs, is strongly discouraged.
- Do not use light bulb wattage which is too high for the fixture. Look for the label inside each fixture which tells the maximum wattage.
- Check periodically for loose wall receptacles, loose wires, or loose lighting fixtures. Sparking means that you've waited too long.
- Allow air space around the TV to prevent overheating. The same applies to plug-in radios and stereo sets, and to powerful lamps.
- If a circuit breaker trips or a fuse blows frequently, immediately cut down on the number of appliances on that line.
- Be sure all electrical equipment bears the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) label.
- In many older homes, the capacity of the wiring system has not kept pace with today's modern appliances. Overloaded electrical systems invite fire. Watch for these overload signals: dimming lights when an appliance goes on, a shrinking TV picture, slow heating appliances, or fuses blowing frequently. Call a qualified electrician to get expert help.

KITCHEN

Careless cooking is the number one cause of residential fires. Never leave cooking unattended.

- It's wise to have a fire extinguisher near the kitchen. Keep it 10 feet away from the stove on the exit side of the kitchen.
- Never pour water on a grease fire; turn off the stove and cover the pan with a lid, or close the oven door.
- Keep pot handles on the stove pointing to the back, and always watch young children in the kitchen.
- Don't store items on the stove top, as they could catch fire.
- Keep kitchen appliances clean and in good condition, and turn them off and disconnect them when not in use.
- Don't overload kitchen electrical outlets and don't use appliances with frayed or cracked wires.

- Wear tight-fitting clothing when you cook. Here's why: An electrical coil on the stove reaches a temperature of 800 degrees. A gas flame goes over 1,000 degrees. Your dish towel or pot holder can catch fire at 400 degrees. So can your bathrobe, apron, or loose sleeve.
- Be sure your stove is not located under a window in which curtains are hanging.
- Clean the exhaust hood and duct over the stove regularly. and wipe up spilled grease as soon as the surface of the stove is cool.
- Operate your microwave only when there is food in it.

CHILDREN and GRANDCHILDREN

One-fourth of all fire-deaths of children are from fires started by children.

- Keep lighters and matches out of the reach of children.
- Never leave children unattended with fire or space heaters.
- Children are naturally curious about fire, so keep an eye on them. But if a child repeatedly plays with fire or seems to have a morbid fascination with fire, seek professional help at once.
- If youngsters live with you or stay overnight occasionally, be sure that they know how to escape from every room and are part of your emergency exit plan. [See "Thinking Ahead" above]

GASOLINE and OTHER FLAMMABLE LIQUIDS

Those cans aren't painted red just for the fun of it!

- Flammable liquids should be stored only in approved safety containers, and the containers should be kept outside the house and garage in a separate storage shed.
- Gas up lawn equipment and snowthrowers outside, away from enclosed areas and any source of sparks or heat.
- Start the equipment 10 feet from where you filled it with fuel.
- Don't fill a hot lawn mower, snowthrower, or other motor; let it cool first.
- Never clean floors or do other general cleaning with gasoline or flammable liquids.

SMOKING

If you actually believe that you're immune from cancer, heart disease, emphysema, and other ills, at least worry about burning to death.

- Never smoke in bed.
- Don't smoke when you are drinking or are abnormally tired.
- Use large, deep ashtrays, and empty them frequently.
- Never dump an ashtray into the trash without wetting the butts and ashes first.