

Fire Prevention



A Fire Prevention Centennial

For the past 100 years, the National Fire Prevention Association has dedicated a week in early October to helping educate people about the dangers of fire and what can be done to minimize those risks.

This year, they'll celebrate Fire Prevention Week from Oct. 9 to 15.

The first public observation of the safety week was in 1922 and, by 1925, President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed it a national observance. Fire Prevention Week is the longest-running public health observance in the United States.

HISTORY OF FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

The week — which is always the one in which Oct. 9 occurs — was picked in commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire. That fire, according to the National Fire Prevention Association, started on Oct. 8, 1871, and spread rapidly, killing more than 250 people, leaving 100,000 people homeless and destroying more than 17,400 structures. It also burned more than 2,000 acres of land.

There were many factors that made that fire so deadly and destroyed one-third of the city.



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A Fire Prevention Week display in 1947 in Oak Ridge, Tenn. The first public observance of Fire Prevention Week was in 1922, making 2022 the centennial event.

At least one factor was that the city was made almost entirely of wood. Even the sidewalks were made of wood and sawdust was used on the roads. It was a fire that changed the ways cities are built. The lessons learned from that fire spread and new codes were put in place that included the width of streets and the materials used to build buildings.

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK EVENTS

Fire Prevention Week focus-

es on spreading lifesaving public education. Firefighters go into schools and public places and teach what to do in the event of a fire. Teachers set aside time for fire safety lessons. The NFPA releases educational material that teaches how to reduce fire hazards in a home and what to do in the case of a fire.

In 2022, the theme is “Fire Won’t Wait. Plan Your Escape.”

Throughout the country, various organizations plan events for the week. In West

Virginia, the state fire marshal sponsors a fire safety poster contest.

The winning entrant would earn the cover of a fire prevention calendar, be featured during the month and be named a fire marshal for the day.

The USA Fire Safety Amateur Radio Club gives out certificates to people who work stations during Fire Prevention Week.

Some fire departments host open houses where they offer

tours and provide fire prevention education.

Fire Prevention Week is a great time to schedule such safety tasks as changing the batteries in your fire alarm, testing alarms, planning and practicing an escape route and learning how to use a fire extinguisher.

While fire safety is important year-round, Oct. 9-15 is a great time to put extra emphasis on learning what to do in the event of a fire and how to prevent the fire in the first place.

Find or Give Help after a Fire

A home fire can be devastating. Making it out alive is the first and most important step, but dealing with the losses can last a long time after the final embers of the fire have been snuffed.

If you or someone you know has lost their home, there are places to go that can help. There are also ways to be a helper from volunteer fire fighting to working with volunteer organizations.

GETTING HELP

Perhaps the best-known source of help is the Red Cross. They train disaster action teams that often arrive at the scene of the fire to offer immediate assistance to those in need. They help provide longer term assistance as well, especially to people who do not have home insurance.

Ready.gov offers the following advice for what to do immediately after a fire:

- Contact local disaster relief services such as the Red Cross or the Salvation Army. They may be able to help with temporary housing, food and medicine.
- Do not re-enter your residence until the fire department tells you it is safe to do so.
- Do not reconnect utilities. That is something that should



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be done either by the fire department or the utility company.

- Create a list or inventory of property and items that were damaged. Don't throw anything away until you've added it to the list or taken a picture of it.
- Save your receipts for any money that you spend related to fire loss, including hotel stays, cleaning expenses or other expenses.
- Notify your mortgage company and home insurance company of the fire.

Your insurance company can

provide a lot of help during this time. They may be able to pay for temporary housing, relocation expenses or even pet boarding expenses. They are also a great place to turn to for help in finding professionals to help you clean or rebuild your home.

Find out whether your local fire department is part of the Firefighters Charitable Foundation. If they are, they might be able to provide you with hygiene kits or other care packages.

Avoid fire victim fund

sweepstakes. Most of these, if not all of these, are scams.

Don't forget your mental health. Local crisis counseling centers can be a great source for mental health care following a disaster, especially if you have lost a loved one.

HELPING OTHERS

Perhaps you are in a position where you want to help others. The Red Cross is always looking for volunteers for its Disaster Action Team. These folks are ready to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day all

year round.

Duties range from providing a shoulder to cry on to helping connect people with resources for their immediate needs or long-term assistance.

The Red Cross looks for people who are team oriented, available at least four to six hours a week, comfortable with ambiguity, bilingual (not required, but desired), empathetic and compassionate, calm in crisis and may have disaster response experience.

They provide all the necessary training.

Prevent Home Heating Fires

There are many ways that fires start in homes. The most common are cooking fires. The second most leading cause is heating equipment.

FACTS ABOUT HEATING EQUIPMENT FIRES

The National Fire Protection Association reported that each year between 2014 and 2018, local fire departments responded to an average of 48,530 fires that involved heating equipment. Annual losses add up to 500 civilian deaths, 1,350 civilian injuries and \$1.1 billion in direct property damage. Heating equipment caused one in seven home fires in that period and accounted for 19% of home fire deaths.

Failing to clean such things as solid-fueled heating equipment or chimneys accounted for 25% of home heating equipment fires, while 54% of home heating fire deaths were caused by having heating equipment too close to flammable materials.

The U.S. Fire Administration breaks down things further. They report that between 2017 and 2019, portable heaters account for 41% of fatal heating fires in residential buildings. They most often started in bedrooms and 48% were caused by having the heat source too close to combustible objects. The majority of



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home heating fires of all kinds took place between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. with the highest peak from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Most home heating fire deaths (81%), according to the NFPA, involved portable or stationary space heaters. The most common months for these fires to occur are January, February and December.

Why so many deaths? The Red Cross reports that nearly half of Americans use alternative heating sources such as fireplaces, space heaters and wood/coal stoves to stay warm. That's a lot of extra risk.

PREVENTION TIPS

How can you avoid fires from home heating devices? The Red Cross offers several tips.

First, keep all flammable items such as paper, clothing, bedding or rugs at least three feet away from space heaters, stoves and fireplaces. Don't ever leave a space heater or fireplace unattended. Before you go to bed or leave your home, turn off the space heater and make sure that any fireplace embers have been put out.

Put space heaters on level, hard and non-flammable sur-

faces such as ceramic tile floors. Do not put them on rugs, carpets, near bedding or curtains. Keep children and pets away from space heaters. When you buy a space heater, look for a model that has an automatic shut-off in the event of the heater falling over.

Don't use a cooking range or oven to heat your home.

Install a large glass or metal fire screen on your fireplace that can catch sparks and rolling logs. At least once a year, have professionals inspect and clean your wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys

and furnaces.

SPREADING THE WORD

The NFPA has several resources directly dealing with home heating fire prevention care. On their website, www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Top-fire-causes/Heating, you can download a community toolkit, a heating safety tip sheet or follow links to videos talking about home heating safety in multiple languages.

The U.S. Fire Administration also offers safety resources www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/heating.html.

Disabilities and Fire Safety

Fires are dangerous for everyone, but there are additional safety concerns that people who have disabilities experience. The standard fire protection equipment isn't always designed to accommodate their needs.

FACTS ABOUT FIRES AND DISABILITIES

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there are about 700 home fires each year that involve people with physical disabilities and about 1,700 home fires that involve people with mental disabilities.

Some of the conditions that put people at greater risk during a fire are decreased mobility, poor health and sight and hearing limitations. Many people need help from a caretaker, neighbor or other outside source to be protected from fire dangers.

The National Park Service says that older adults, people with physical or mental disabilities, the deaf or hard of hearing and people with visual impairments can increase their chances of surviving a fire by practicing fire safety precautions.

DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

Companies are increasingly designing smoke alarms and alert devices with the hard of hearing in mind. These

alarms will do such things as flash strobe lights when the smoke alarm sounds. They can be connected to a bed or pillow to shake a person awake.

The NFPA Research Foundation has shown that older adults are less likely to respond to alarms with strobe lights and even those with moderate hearing loss are less likely to hear high-pitched sounds. In response, smoke alarm manufacturers have created alert devices that emit a mixed, low-pitch sound.

Everyone in the house needs to be aware of what each signal (light, vibration or sound) means and how to respond to it.

PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

Plan your escape route around what you are capable of doing. Make sure the plan considers any special needs you have. Identify at least two exits from every room.

If you use a walker or wheelchair, check the exits to make sure you will be able to get through the doorways.

Modify your home to



ANDY MABBETT/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The FireAngel smoke detector has a strobe light, as well as a vibrating pad that is used under a deaf person's pillow to wake them in a fire.

accommodate your mobility needs, which might include building exit ramps, widening doors or installing handlebars.

Keep a phone by your bed or at your side in case you cannot get out and need to

contact someone for help.

REACH OUT

Don't isolate yourself. Talk to others about your needs. Contact the local fire department. They might be willing to come do a home inspection or

review your escape plan. Ask them if they keep a directory of those who need extra help and ask to be placed on it.

Talk to family members, neighbors or building managers about your fire safety plan and practice it with them.

Inspect your Home for Hazards

Home fires are as dangerous as ever — in fact, some sources say they are more dangerous because of the proliferation of electronics that can make a fire spread even faster and provide more sources for a fire to start.

Once a fire does start, it can take as little as two minutes to become life threatening. It's why it is important to do a regular inventory of your home searching out fire hazards and correcting them as much as possible.

SMOKE ALARMS

Yes, it's annoying when they go off because you overcooked the Thanksgiving pie, but they save lives. Make sure you have several at key places in your house.

Either install 10-year batteries or schedule twice annual battery replacements. Some suggest replacing them when the clocks change, but if you live in a place where there isn't daylight savings time, you'll want to pick two other dates that are six months apart. For example, you might choose the winter and summer solstice days or Fire Prevention Week in October and April Fool's Day (because you don't want to be a fire fool).



KITCHEN INSPECTION

Cooking is the most common cause of home fires, usually on the stovetop. It's why you want to search out fire hazards and follow safety guidelines such as never leaving something on the stove unattended.

What should you look for?

The American Red Cross suggests checking curtains, towel racks and paper towel dispensers and make sure they aren't too close to the burners. Microwaves should be free of surrounding clutter and have its vents free.

Keep a fire extinguisher within easy reach. Don't ever

put water on a grease fire.

MAINTAIN APPLIANCES

When it comes to appliances, the guilty culprit is a dryer 90% of the time. Clean out the lint screen after every dryer load. Check to make sure your appliances are up to date and meet current fire codes.

ELECTRONICS AND OUTLETS

As electronics proliferate, they must be plugged in somewhere. It's why electrical outlets need to be high on your to-do list when it comes to searching your home for fire hazards.

The Red Cross recommends inspecting outlets to see if they are overloaded or show signs of wear. Arrange things so as many appliances as possible have their own outlets and use extension cords to reach more distant outlets.

Avoid running extension cords under rugs, even if it does make things look a little more attractive.

Look to see what the manufacturer recommends for the wattage of bulbs for each of your lamps. Use bulbs with equal or less wattage.

When you aren't using your electronics, unplug them. Make sure you have sufficient space around televisions and computers because they can overheat and cause fires if they touch or are too near anything flammable.

EVERYWHERE ELSE

Finally, walk through such places as your garage, basement, yard and storage areas. Avoid cluttering debris or junk near your heater. Recycle old newspapers and don't store them in damp, warm places.

Keep any gasoline or flammable liquids tightly sealed in metal containers. Keep your gas or charcoal grill at least 10 feet away from your home and away from any overhead branches or structures.

Fire Safety and Travel

The last thing you want to think about when traveling is a fire taking place at the hotel or lodging property where you are staying.

Yet, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, there are an estimated 3,900 hotel and motel fires each year that cause 15 deaths, 100 injuries and \$100 million in property losses.

The National Fire Prevention Association did additional research from 2009 to 2013 and found that while most fires started in a lodging property's kitchen, the majority of deaths came from fires that started in the bedroom. Nearly 75% of those deaths were from smoking materials. It's one of many reasons that most properties now ban smoking indoors.

In 1990, the federal government passed a Hotel & Motel Fire Safety Act. It prohibits federal contractors from staying at hotels that don't meet minimal fire safety standards. The good news is that FEMA makes that list public so anyone can consult it. It is available here: apps.usfa.fema.gov/hotel.

SAFE PRACTICES

Once you get into your hotel room, there are some things you can do to stay safe. The National Park Service, which



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publishes information to keep travelers safe, and the NFPA recommends doing the following tasks:

- Reading any fire safety information in the guestroom. It is often posted on the back of the entry door or somewhere nearby.
- Planning an escape route ahead of time. Find the two exits that are closest to your room.
- Testing the fire exit doors

to ensure they work and are unlocked. If they are locked, immediately report it to management.

- Locating the nearest fire alarm and reading the operating instructions.
- Keeping your room key and a flashlight near the bed. Take them with you in the event of a fire.
- Counting the number of doors between you and the exit in case you have to

escape in the dark.

SURVIVING A FIRE

If a fire starts at a property, you need to evacuate as soon as possible. Follow the escape plan that you developed. When an alarm goes off, leave immediately, shutting doors behind you and using the stairs to exit the building.

If there is smoke covering your escape route, get as low as you can and crawl under

the smoke to your exit.

If the worse happens and you can't escape, the NFPA recommends doing the following:

- Turn off all fans and air conditioners.
- Stuff wet towels in the crack around the door.
- Call the fire department and let them know where you are.
- Wait at the window and signal with a flashlight or light-colored cloth.

Fire Safety Can Be Fun

Teaching your kids about fire safety can save their lives and prevent them from life-altering injuries and burns.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, about 300 people are killed each year as the result of children playing with fire.

Yet, no one wants their children to live in fear or have nightmares about their home burning down. It's why many organizations have developed fun ways to teach kids about fire safety without scaring them.

BOOKS

Books are a great way to teach kids about anything and fire safety is no exception. Many authors have come up with creative and appealing ways to get the message across. Here are a few suggestions:

- "Curious George and the Firefighters" by Margaret and H.A. Rey
- "Fire Drill" by Paul DuBois Jacobs and Jennifer Swender
- "Richard Scarry's Busiest Firefighters Ever" A Little Golden Book
- "Plan and Prepare" by Charles Ghigna, music included
- "Stop, Drop and Roll" by Margery Cuyler
- "The Berenstain Bears Visit the Firehouse" by Mike Berenstain
- "No Dragons for Tea: Fire Safety for Kids (and Dragons)"



AIRMAN 1ST CLASS ISAAC GUEST/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

by Jean E. Pendziwol and Martine Gourbault

GAMES AND APPS

Kids love to learn through playing games and today's kids are fluent with phone apps.

The Red Cross has created Pedro's Fire Safety Challenge for Google Assistant and Alexa-enabled devices. Designed for children ages 4-8, it teaches fire safety skills. Pedro the Penguin leads children through activities that teach about home fire safety, coping skills and pen-

guin fun. Once completing the challenge, kids can earn a fire safety badge.

The NFPA has teamed up with Kahoot! Academy to create fire safety education fun on phones and computers. They announced the new collection of fire safety Kahoots in July. It has activities that teach about cooking safety, home fire escape and smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

SPARKY

The National Fire Prevention

Association has many resources for teaching kids about fire safety. It's part of what they are all about. Their mascot, who is now nearing 70 years old, is Sparky the Fire Dog.

It's a tradition that started in 1951 with the original Sparky the Fire Dog where kids could send in a quarter and be a part of Sparky's fire department. In the 1960s, he got his own song. In the 1990s, he teamed up with Smokey Bear and in 2010 he learned to play the electric guitar and started creating his

own music videos.

The NFPA still tries to make Sparky special for kids. One of the things they do is offer NFPA Kids challenges. Kids who successfully complete them get to become official members of Sparky's Fire Safety Club. They even get their own avatar.

The Safety Club website invites kids to take a fire safety pledge and then provides videos, games, activities and other features for kids to play with and enjoy.