

Fire Prevention



Smoke Alarms Save Lives

The National Safety Council says that three out of five fire deaths happen in homes without working smoke alarms.

Smoke alarms can alert you to a fire early, giving you and your loved ones plenty of time to get to safety.

WHERE TO INSTALL SMOKE ALARMS

The National Fire Protection Association recommends you install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, as well as inside all the bedrooms and outside sleeping areas on the ceiling or high up on the wall. On levels that don't have a bedroom, place the alarm in the living room, den or family room, or near the stairway to the upper level.

To keep smoke alarms from going off accidentally, keep them away from the kitchen and at least 10 feet from the stove. You can get special alarms for people who are hard of hearing or deaf.

The NFPA says to avoid installing alarms in the peak of pitched ceilings and near windows, doors or ducts where drafts might interfere with proper operation. Do not ever paint smoke alarms or adorn them with stickers or other decorations.

Look for smoke alarms that have the label of a recognized testing laboratory.



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TESTING SMOKE ALARMS

Test all your smoke alarms at least once a month. Press the test button on the alarm to make sure it's in correct working order. Consider using interconnected smoke alarms so that when one alarm sounds,

they all sound. You should replace all smoke alarms when they are 10 years old.

MORE THAN JUST SMOKE

Today's more technologically advanced alarms can detect more than just smoke. Some can also detect heat and carbon

monoxide, an odorless but deadly gas that can accumulate in the home from a gas leak or a malfunctioning furnace, oven or space heater.

FREE SMOKE ALARMS

The American Red Cross or your local fire department may

install a free fire alarm for your family. You can sign up and look for campaigns on your fire department's social media or on redcross.org. Some chapters of the Red Cross can also help you make a fire escape plan for your family, which you should practice regularly.

Top Causes of House Fires

Cooking causes nearly half of house fires, the National Fire Prevention Association says, followed by heating, electrical malfunctions, smoking and candles.

Here's how to prevent fires in each one of these categories.

COOKING FIRES

Cooking is responsible for nearly half of house fires and 20% of home fire deaths. Thanksgiving is typically the peak for cooking fires, followed by Christmas Day and Christmas Eve. Never leave food unattended and don't start cooking if you're sleepy or have consumed alcohol. Keep anything that can catch fire, such as oven mitts, food packaging or towels, away from the stovetop.

HEATING FIRES

Nearly 500 people died in heating fires from 2016-2020 and heating fires during that time caused more than \$1 billion in property damage. Keep anything that can burn at least three feet from heating equipment. Also keep children away from open fires and space heaters in the home. Never use your oven as a heat source and use a qualified professional to install space heaters, water heaters or central heating equipment. Hire a professional to clean and



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inspect heaters and chimneys every year and you always turn off portable heaters when you leave the room or go to bed.

ELECTRICAL FIRES

All electrical work should be done by a qualified electrician. Be on the lookout for sparking outlets, a burning smell from any appliance, or discolored or warm wall outlets. Call your landlord or an

electrical professional if you experience these or any other electrical problems. Only use one heat-producing appliance at a time and plug all major appliances directly into the wall outlet, not into a power strip or an extension cord.

SMOKING FIRES

Smoking fires caused 600 deaths in 2016 and are the leading cause of fire deaths, the NFPA says. If you smoke, smoke

outside. Keep cigarettes, lighters, matches and other smoking materials high up out of the reach of children, in a locked cabinet. Use a deep, sturdy ashtray to extinguish smoking materials. Do not toss cigarettes in vegetation such as potted plants or landscaping. Never allow anyone to smoke where medical oxygen is used.

CANDLES

Candles caused an estimat-

ed 7,400 house fires from 2015-2019. Blow out all the candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Avoid using candles in bedrooms or other areas where someone can fall asleep.

Keep candles at least a foot away from anything that can burn. Use sturdy candle holders and place candles on an uncluttered surface. Never use candles if medical oxygen is used in the home.

Wildfire Dangers

Wildfires are unplanned fires that burn in natural areas such as forests, grasslands or prairies.

Officials often have planned burns in these kinds of areas to properly manage the wild habitat; wildfires aren't set intentionally and often lead to property damage and even deaths.

PREPARING FOR WILDFIRES

If you live in an area that's prone to wildfires, have several ways to receive alerts about fires from the National Weather Service and local officials. Pay attention to your local air quality alerts, too. Have an emergency plan ready and make sure everyone in your family knows what they need to do. Make a plan for everywhere you regularly spend time, including the office, school and daycare.

Keep your personal documents and insurance policies up to date and know what your coverage is before a wildfire threatens. Around your home, make sure you use fire resistant materials when you can. Keep leaves, debris and other flammable materials away from your home. Designate a room inside that can be closed off from outside air and keep a portable air cleaner handy to manage indoor pollution from wildfire smoke.

Lastly, know your evacuation routes and listen to local emer-



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gency management officials when they tell you to get out.

DURING A WILDFIRE

Pay close attention to emergency alerts and notifications. If authorities tell you to get out, listen. Enact your family emergency plan and let friends

and family know where they can find you. If you are trapped, call 911, but be aware that emergency response could be delayed or even impossible. Consider using N95 masks to protect yourself from smoke inhalation. Use high efficiency filters in your central air con-

ditioning and set the system to recirculate if it has a fresh air intake.

AFTER A FIRE

Do not return home until local authorities say it is safe to do so. Avoid hot ash, charred trees, smoldering debris and

live embers. Be aware that the ground may contain heat pockets that can burn you or even spark another fire. Use a respirator to limit your exposure to dust particles. Document your property damage with photographs. Contact your insurance company for assistance.

Wildfire Prevention: It's up to You

Nine out of every 10 wildfires are caused by human actions.

These are preventable fires that cause millions in property damage every year and even take people's lives. Here are some tips from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Wildland Fire for preventing wildfires.

CHECK THE WEATHER

Before setting an outdoor fire, check weather and drought conditions. Skip the flames if it's hot, dry and windy or if prolonged drought has local vegetation crispy and flammable.

BUILD A CAMPFIRE PROPERLY

Choose a campfire location that's flat, open and far from flammables. Scrape away grass, leaves and debris until you get down to the bare soil. Cut your wood into short lengths, pile it in the cleared area, and then light your fire. Stay with your fire; don't leave it unattended for any reason. Extinguish it completely before leaving. Keep water nearby in case the fire gets out of hand for any reason.

DOUSING YOUR FIRE

Make sure your campfire is out completely by following these steps.

- Douse it with at least one bucket of water.
- Stir it.
- Douse it again with another



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bucket of water.

- Stir it again.
- Make sure the campfire is cold to the touch before leaving.

KEEP VEHICLES OFF DRY GRASS

Your exhaust can reach temperatures of 1,000 degrees. Avoid parking your vehicle on dry grass or even driving over it. Stay on the paths for off-roading and other activities.

MAINTAIN YOUR EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLE PROPERLY

Vehicles and power equipment can shoot sparks from their exhaust if they aren't maintained properly. These sparks can fly several feet, igniting fires in the right conditions.

Carry a shovel, bucket and fire extinguisher to put out any fires. Outfit off-highway

vehicles with a spark arrester, and make sure tires, bearings and axles are properly maintained, even on trailers.

CAN THE FIREWORKS

Fireworks start more than 19,000 fires each year in the U.S. Check federal, state and city regulations before setting off fireworks. Consider safer alternatives, such as glow sticks or silly string.

BURNING DEBRIS

Don't burn trash, leaves, debris or agricultural waste when it's windy and make sure you have water nearby for all burns.

Once you're finished, mop up the ashes with water and stir them.

Wildfires often start from holdover debris piles that weren't properly extinguished.

Grilling Safety

Nothing beats the taste of chargrilled steak or burgers, but it's much easier to enjoy your meal when it's prepared safely.

The National Fire Prevention Association says that U.S. fire departments respond to an average of 10,600 fires a year that involve grills, hibachis or barbecues.

RECIPE FOR SAFETY

Keep the grill away from the house, decks or other structures and out from under eaves and overhanging branches. Keep your grill clean by removing grease or fat building from the grills and the trays below the grill. Never leave your grill unattended.

SAFE GRILLING: GAS OR PROPANE

When you're using a gas grill, check the tank and gas lines for leaks before you fire it up. Apply a light soap and water solution to the hose and connections. A leak will release bubbles. If you find a leak, either through the bubble test or by smell, turn off both the gas tank and the gas grill. Have your grill serviced before using it again. If turning it off doesn't stop the leak, call the fire department.

Make sure the lid to your gas grill is open before lighting it and keep children and



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pets away from a lit grill. If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call the fire department.

SAFE GRILLING: CHARCOAL

If you're using charcoal and plan to use starter fluid, make sure you're using the correct

kind. Never use alternative flammable liquids to get the fire started. Keep charcoal and fluid away from children and other heat sources. Let the coals cool completely before disposing of them in a metal container.

TREATING BURNS

About half of injuries

involving grills are burns. Burns are classified in three categories, or degrees. A first-degree burn affects the outermost layer of skin and can cause a moderate amount of pain, redness and swelling, says American Family Care Urgent Care. Treat these burns at home by cooling the area with a clean, damp cloth.

Then cover the burn with a sterile dressing or cloth. Relieve pain with over-the-counter pain relievers and keep the burn clean with water and mild soap.

Seek medical care if you're experiencing blistering, lingering pain, numbness, inflammation, warmth or fever and chills.

Fireplace Safety

Nothing sets a cozy scene like a crackling fire in the fireplace. But fireplaces can be dangerous, too.

A leading cause of house fires, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says, is a failure to clean creosote and other debris from chimneys.

BEFORE YOU BUILD A FIRE

Make sure the damper or flue is open before starting a fire. Keep it open until the fire is completely out to draw smoke out of the house. Check the damper by looking up into the chimney with a flashlight or mirror.

Install both smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Test them monthly and change the batteries at least once a year.

Have a fire extinguisher on hand and check for blockages in the chimney such as animal nests.

Have chimneys checked annually by a professional.

Talk to your children and family about the danger of fires and have a family evacuation plan in case of a house fire. Practice it regularly so that everyone knows what to do. Building a Fire

Use dry, well-aged wood to build your fire. Wet or green wood can cause more smoke and contributes to soot build-up in the chimney. Use smaller pieces of wood and always



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clean out the ashes from previous fires. Allowing ash to build up can restrict air supply to the logs, resulting in more smoke.

Keep the area around the fireplace clear of anything that can burn and keep chil-

dren and pets away from the fire. Never leave a fire unattended and make sure it is completely out before going to sleep or leaving the house. If possible, keep a window cracked open while you have a fire burning.

MORE SAFETY TIPS

You should also use fireplace safety screens, even on glass fireplaces. Keep fireplace tools and accessories out of the reach of children. Remove lighters and matches as well. Talk to children in the

household about the dangers of fires and the heat from the fires.

Make sure they understand that even the embers can hurt them. Also make sure they know what to do in the event of an emergency.

Recovering from a House Fire

When the worst has happened, it can be difficult to know what to do next.

If you're one of the thousands of Americans affected by a house fire every year, here's what to do next.

BEFORE A FIRE

Lower your fire risk by practicing good fire safety tips and installing smoke alarms properly in your home. Test them every month and change the batteries annually. Know your insurance coverage and keep your policies and other important documents in a fire-safe box. Back electronic copies up on the cloud or store them outside the home on a thumb drive. Have a home inventory in there, too, that lists what you have in your home along with serial numbers and photographs. Plan how to escape a house fire and make sure everyone knows what to do. Practice the plan regularly and update it as needed.

AFTER A FIRE

Finding a safe place to stay is critical. Your local fire department can help you determine whether your home is safe to stay in. If not, and you can't stay with friends and family, talk to local disaster relief agencies such as the American Red Cross. They can help you find a place to stay temporarily. Once you're safe, let friends and family know.



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Contact your insurance agent to start a claim. You may have coverage for the loss of the use of your home and daily expenses. Save your receipts and keep a detailed record of your purchases. Your agent can help you secure your property and offer recommendations for restoration.

If you're a renter, call your landlord and let them know about the fire.

PROTECT YOUR HOME

Even and especially if you're not staying there, you have an obligation to protect your home from further damage. Line up help or contractors to secure your home and protect

it from the elements as soon as you can.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR PETS

You may wish to be seen by a doctor or take your pets to the veterinarian to make sure everyone's healthy. Pets, in particular, can hide pain and injury.

DOCUMENT

Take pictures of your damaged property to document what needs to be replaced. Get a copy of the fire report and organize receipts and any other documentation you have. Start replacing any important documents that you've lost, such as passports, marriage licenses and birth certificates.