

Safety Tips

Smoke Alarms and Detectors

Smoke detectors are devices that automatically sound a warning when they sense smoke or other products of combustion. They are usually mounted on a wall or the ceiling. When people are warned early enough about a fire, they can escape before it spreads.

Every year house fires kill thousands. Fire kills an estimated 4,000 Americans every year. Another 30,000 people are seriously injured by fire each year. Property damage from fire costs us billions of dollars annually. Most fire victims feel that fire would "never happen to them."

Although we like to feel safe at home, about two-thirds of our nation's fire deaths happen in the victim's own home. The home is where we must take the most precautions. Most deaths occur from inhaling smoke or poisonous gases, not from actual flames.

Most fatal fires occur in residential buildings between 11 PM and 6 AM when occupants are most likely asleep. Over 90 percent of fire deaths in buildings occur in residential dwellings.

It is widely believed that 75 percent of residential fire deaths and 84 percent of residential fire injuries could have been prevented by smoke detectors.

There are two basic types of smoke detectors:

- 1. Ionization detectors:** These contain radioactive material that ionizes the air, making an electrical path. When smoke enters, the smoke molecules attach themselves to the ions. The change in electric current flow triggers the alarm. The radioactive material is called americium. It's a radioactive metallic element produced by bombardment of plutonium with high energy neutrons. The amount is very small and not harmful.
- 2. Photo-electric detectors:** These contain a light source (usually a bulb) and a photocell, which is activated by light. Light from the bulb reflects off the smoke particles and is directed towards the photocell. The photocell then is activated to trigger the alarm.

Choosing a smoke detector:

When choosing a smoke detector, there are several things to consider. Think about which areas of the house you want to protect, where fire would be most dangerous, how many you will need, etc.

It is recommended that every home have a smoke detector outside each sleeping area (inside as well if members of the household sleep with the door closed) and on every level of the home, including the basement. The National Fire Alarm code requires a smoke detector inside each sleeping area for new construction. On floors without bedrooms, detectors should be installed in or near living areas, such as dens, living rooms or family rooms. Smoke detectors are not recommended for kitchens.

Installation:

The placement of smoke detectors is very important. Sleeping areas need the most protection. One detector in a short hallway outside the bedroom area is usually adequate. Hallways longer than 30 feet should have one at each end. For maximum protection, install a detector in each bedroom.

Be sure to keep the detector away from fireplaces and wood stoves to avoid false alarms. Place smoke detectors at the top of each stairwell and at the end of each long hallway. Smoke rises easily through stairwells. If you should put a smoke detector in your kitchen, be sure to keep it away from cooking fumes or smoking areas.

It's important to properly mount a smoke detector. You can mount many detectors by yourself, however those connected to your household wiring should have their own separate circuit and be installed by a professional electrician. If you mount your detector on the ceiling, be sure to keep it at least 18 inches away from dead air space near walls and corners. If you mount it on the wall, place it six to 12 inches below the ceiling and away from corners. Keep them high because smoke rises.

Never place them any closer than three feet from an air register that might recirculate smoke, near doorways or windows where drafts could impair detector operation, or on an un-insulated exterior wall or ceiling since temperature extremes can affect the batteries.

Maintenance:

It's simple to keep smoke detectors in good condition. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions, and replace the batteries every year or as needed. Most models will make a chirping, popping or beeping sound when the battery is losing its charge. When this sound is heard, install a fresh battery, preferably an alkaline type.

Remember, every three years to change the bulbs, and keep extras handy. Check smoke detectors monthly by releasing smoke or pushing the "test" button. Clean the detector face and grillwork often to remove dust and grease, and never paint a smoke detector as it will hamper its function. Check your detector if you've been away from home.

Smoke detectors make great gifts. It's an interesting present that can save lives and it shows that you care.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

New technology has made it possible to produce a low-cost, reliable carbon monoxide (CO) detector for the home. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas. It causes hundreds of fatalities in homes each year, and thousands more are treated in hospitals for CO poisoning. Carbon monoxide combines with hemoglobin in our blood and robs the blood of the oxygen our body needs. Early symptoms of exposure include headache, fatigue, nausea and confusion. Without treatment, victims lose consciousness, and if no help is given will lose their life.

Carbon monoxide is produced by combustion. Common causes are:

1. Defective gas or oil furnaces and water heaters.
2. Cracked chimney flues.
3. Indoor use of charcoal grills.
4. Use of a gas oven or range to warm a room.
5. Running a car in an enclosed area.
6. Closing the fireplace damper before the fire is completely out.

Carbon monoxide accidents are preventable. Actions you should take to protect your family are:

1. Have a qualified technician inspect your gas furnace and appliances every Fall.
2. Never run a car in an enclosed area, especially if it's attached to your house.

3. Make sure your fireplace is in good repair and don't close the damper before the fire is out.
4. Install CO detectors to warn your family if CO is building up in your house.

Several types of CO detectors are on the market. One type is plugged into a wall socket and has a life of about 10 years. The other type of detector uses a chemical sensor and battery. The sensor/battery unit has a two year limited warranty and does indicate a low battery by beeping once a minute. To keep this detector operating properly, the sensor/battery must be replaced when the battery is low. CO detectors can be inexpensively purchased. Make sure the detector that you purchase meets the requirements of the current Underwriters Laboratory (UL) standard 2034.

Regardless of the detector you choose, there are some things you need to know. Carbon monoxide detectors should be located on every floor and mounted according to the manufacture's instructions. If the detector goes off, get out of the house at once and call the fire department by dialing 911 from a neighbor's house. Do not ventilate your house by opening doors and windows. When the fire department arrives they will obtain CO readings in different areas of your home to determine the source of the CO.

CO detectors don't sense smoke or fire, and smoke detectors are needed to give your family early warning if there is a fire in your home.

If you are concerned about whether your furnace and/or appliances are working properly, have them inspected by a professional. If you have questions about your gas furnace or appliances, contact your gas company.

Winter Safety Tips

Keep Fire Hydrants Clear of Snow: An accessible and properly functioning fire hydrant is a vital part of any firefighting operation. Avoid piling snow on or around fire hydrants. If possible, especially during very heavy snow falls, take a few extra minutes to 'adopt' your nearest fire hydrant by clearing the snow from around the hydrant. This improves firefighter's ability to quickly locate and access the hydrant in an emergency.

Keep Roads Clear for Emergency Vehicles: Operating an emergency vehicle such as a fire truck or an ambulance is a complex job under perfect weather conditions that becomes even more challenging under the current weather conditions. Please

exercise extra caution when driving and yield the right of way to emergency vehicles responding to alarms. Drivers should do everything possible to avoid blocking access to snow emergency streets or other key thoroughfares.

Make Sure That The Address On Your Home is Visible From the Street:

While you are out clearing the driveway and the walk, clear off the markings on the home or business, so firefighters can quickly reach you in an emergency.

Avoid Fires and Injuries by Practicing Basic Winter Safety: The old adage, 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is particularly applicable during the winter months. Many winter emergencies can be avoided by following some basic safety tips such as:

- 1. Health and Safety:** In the cold weather, monitor young children, elderly family and neighbors, as well as the sick, who are particularly susceptible to the dangers of the cold. Don't venture out in extremely cold weather unless absolutely necessary. If you must go out, be sure to dress in layers with a water and windproof outer layer. A hat is a must as 40% of body heat is lost through the head. Don't smoke or consume alcohol before going out, because they alter your circulatory system, making you colder instead of warming your body. Exercise caution when shoveling snow; overexertion can sometimes lead to tragedy.
- 2. Space Heaters:** Use space heaters for a limited time each day and never connect them to an outlet with an extension cord. When not in use, be sure to unplug the unit and let it cool down before storing it. Keep a window or door open in a room where an unvented heater is in use. Never use heaters to dry clothing or other combustibles.
- 3. Fireplaces:** Before using the fireplace for the first time make sure the flue is open. If there are any obstructions, remove them. If not removed, obstructions will cause carbon monoxide to back up into your home. Never leave a fireplace unattended. Chimneys and vents should be regularly inspected and cleaned. Don't burn newspapers or other trash in a fireplace because they burn too hot and can ignite a chimney fire.
- 4. Coal and Wood Burning Stoves:** Use coal only if specifically approved by the stove manufacturer. Gasoline or other flammable liquids should never be used to start a wood fire since it might explode or flare up.
- 5. Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Detectors:** Test your smoke alarms at least once each month by pressing the test button on the unit. If your detectors are battery operated, check the batteries often to make sure the units are operational. If you do not have one already installed, install a carbon monoxide detector to detect production of potentially lethal carbon monoxide by gas fireplaces, gas stoves, barbecues and gas furnaces.

Holiday Season Safety

Decorations: Wear gloves while decorating with spun glass "angel hair" as it can irritate your skin and eyes. A common substitute is non-flammable cotton. Both angel hair and cotton snow are flame retardant when used alone. If artificial snow is sprayed onto them, the dried combination will burn rapidly. When spraying artificial snow on windows or other surfaces, be sure to carefully follow all directions. These sprays can irritate your lungs if you inhale them.

Fireplaces: Don't burn evergreens or wreaths in a fireplace or wood stove to dispose of them, as they're likely to flare out of control and send flames and smoke into the room. Don't burn wrapping paper because it often contains metallic materials which can be toxic if burned.

Candles: Never use lighted candles near trees, boughs, curtains/drapes, or with any potentially flammable item.

Toys and Gifts: Be especially careful when choosing toys for infants or small children. Avoid toys that can be caught in the throat, nose or ears, or with small parts that can be pulled or broken off. If you are giving toys to several children in one family, consider their age differences and the chances that younger children will want to play with older kids' toys.

Older Adults: Select gifts for older adults that are not heavy or awkward to handle. For persons with arthritis, make sure the gift does not require assembly and can be easily opened and closed. Choose books with large type for anyone who is visually impaired.

Plants: Small children may think that holiday plants look good enough to eat. Many plants, however, can cause severe stomach problems. Plants to watch out for include mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis. Keep these out of children's reach.

Food and Cooking: The holidays often mean preparing large meals for family and friends. Wash hands, utensils, sink and anything else that has come in contact with raw poultry. Keep in mind that a stuffed bird takes longer to cook. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in covered shallow containers (less than two inches deep) within two hours after cooking, and date leftovers for future use.

Alcohol, Parties and Driving: Being a smart host or guest should include being sensible about alcoholic drinks. More than half of all traffic fatalities are alcohol-

related. Use people who do not drink as designated drivers to drive other guests home after a holiday party.

Stress: The holiday season is one of the most stressful times of the year. You can't avoid stress completely, but you can give yourself some relief. Allow enough time to shop rather than hurry through stores and parking lots. Plan to do only a reasonable number of errands. When shopping, make several trips out to the car to drop off packages rather than trying to carry too many items. Take time out for yourself.

Christmas Tree Safety

A fire on any day seems bad, but a fire on Christmas seems to be the worst. Electrical problems are the most common cause for Christmas tree fires. Here's how to keep your tree green and your presents safe:

1. When you buy your tree, have the vendor make a fresh cut an inch from the bottom; this will help the tree drink.
2. If you buy your tree early and keep it outside, store it away from wind and sun, and keep the bottom in a bucket of water.
3. Make sure your lights are safe. If you need outdoor lights, make sure the ones you buy are meant for outdoor use.
4. Make sure your lights carry certification from a testing laboratory. Don't use electric lights on a metal tree.
5. Discard any strings of lights that are frayed or broken.
6. Unplug your Christmas tree before you leave or go to bed.
7. Don't buy a tree that is dry and dropping needles. To check for freshness, loosely grip the end of a branch and pull your hand over it. Only a few needles should fall off.
8. Make sure your tree stand holds plenty of water, and don't let it run out.
9. If your tree seems wobbly, center it in the stand more securely and redo the bolts or screws.
10. If you buy an artificial tree, make sure it is fire-retardant.
11. Keep your tree at least three feet from furnaces, radiators and fireplaces.
12. Try to position your tree near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances. Do not place the tree where it may block exits.
13. When Christmas is over or when the tree starts to drop needles, dispose of it. Don't leave it in your house or put it in your garage.

14. Keep a close eye on small children when they are around the tree; many small decorations and ornaments are sharp, breakable and can be swallowed.

Spring Safety Tips

Spring Forward For Fire Safety: Change Your Smoke Detector Batteries As You Change Your Clocks.

Daylight Saving Time means setting the clocks forward and it's a chance to consider fire safety. It's important to have smoke detectors installed throughout your house but it's not enough to simply install and forget about them. Twice a year, it is critical that you test your smoke detectors and replace their batteries. An easy way to tackle this task is to change your smoke detector batteries as you go through your house to change your clocks. At the same time, it can be helpful to dust or vacuum the detectors to keep them free of debris that can interfere with their operation. Establishing this habit twice a year could save the lives of you and your loved ones.

Most home fire deaths result from fires in homes with no smoke alarms, and smoke detector failures are attributed to a lack of annual battery replacement. Should you neglect to change your smoke detector's batteries, the device may make a chirping sound to alert you that the battery is running low. Do not rely solely on that warning noise. It is always better to proactively change the battery every six months. Once your smoke detectors have been cleaned and their batteries replaced, ensure that everyone in your household is familiar with the sound the smoke alarm emits and knows how to react immediately.

In addition to replacing smoke detector batteries, periodically rid your home of fire hazards that exist in the form of grease, grime and dust that builds up on appliance chords and in hidden corners of the house. Below are some fire safety tips:

Small Appliances: Appliances should be cleared of dust and grime that has collected on the units and their electrical cords. Grease should be removed from the outside of kitchen appliances with a slightly damp rag. The grease pan underneath toaster ovens should also be cleaned.

Large Appliances: The area underneath and behind washer/dryer units should be cleared of dust and stray materials, and the dryer vent should be cleaned. Refrigerators present the extra job of cleaning the condenser coils at the back, as

coils collect dust and grime and need to be wiped clean or vacuumed to keep the condenser functioning. If you have a self-defrosting unit, remember to empty and clean the tray at the bottom of the unit.

Electrical Cords: Check the cords of the washer/dryer, television, stereo system, computer and small appliances such as the coffee pot, microwave and toaster oven. The cords should not be frayed, split or bare and should be unplugged and wiped clean with a dry cloth. Any frayed, split or bare electrical cords should be repaired or replaced to avoid the danger of electrical fires. Systems such as stereos, computers and televisions, which have multiple electrical cords, should be connected through a power strip with a circuit breaker protection to avoid overloading a single electric outlet. Make sure that cords are placed at least 2-3 inches away from the wall and are not run underneath rugs.

Beach and Surf Safety Tips

Like many during the summer months, when the temperature rises you head for the beach. Don't forget to keep the safety of yourself and your loved ones in mind. While the beach can be a great place to cool off, it's important to respect the power of the ocean. A leading cause of accidental death is drowning.

Basic Beach Safety Tips:

- Make sure lifeguards are on duty and check surf conditions before going into the water.
- Swim in an area near a lifeguard tower, never swim alone, and only swim in designated areas.
- Never dive in the surf head first. The water is not always clear and you may not notice obstructions or how shallow the water is in front of you.
- Don't swim out too far or overestimate your swimming ability. Never depend on flotation devices for your safety.
- Never drink alcohol and swim.
- ALWAYS keep an eye on your children. Don't turn away, even for a moment. Children can fall below the surface in a second and it can be impossible to find them fast enough.
- Always hold the hands of younger children. Sudden changes in surf direction can separate them from you in an instant.
- Swim parallel to the shore if you want to swim long distances.
- Wear "Water Shoes" or sandals on the beach to avoid broken glass and sharp shells.

- Lightning strikes at the beach are common in thunder storms. If you hear thunder, get out of the water immediately. Seek shelter in a building or automobile. If no shelter is available, find the lowest spot possible and avoid open spaces. Don't sit under an umbrella and stay away from metal objects like aluminum chairs.
- If you get into trouble in the water, don't panic. Raise and wave your arm for help, float and wait for assistance.
- Wear sunscreen, with at least a level 15 sun protection factor, to protect against burns.

Rip Tide Information:

- 1. What is a "Rip Tide"?** Often mistakenly called undertows, these powerful currents pull even experienced swimmers away from shore. Panic and drowning often result. The currents are formed when water rushes out to sea in a narrow path. This happens when there is a break in a near-shore sandbar or the current is diverted by a jetty or other barrier. Rip currents can extend 1,000 feet offshore, reach 100 feet in width and travel up to 3 mph. Some are present a few hours; others are permanent. Rip currents are more prevalent after storms.
- 2. Telltale signs of a riptide:**
 - A difference in water color - either murkier from sediments or darker from greater depth.
 - A difference in the waves - larger, choppy waves in the rip current; smaller, calmer waves in front of the bar.
 - Foam or objects moving steadily seaward.
 - An offshore plume of turbid water past the sandbars. Polarized sunglasses cut glare and help to spot rip currents.
- 3. What To Do:** If you're caught in a rip current, don't panic or swim against the current. Swim parallel to shore until you are out of the current. Rip currents are rarely more than 30 feet wide. If you can't break out of the current, float calmly until it dissipates, usually just beyond the breakers. Then swim diagonally to shore. If you don't swim well, stay in wading depths and watch for sudden drop-offs.

Pool Safety Tips

Unfortunately, it takes just seconds for a child to drown. Drowning is a leading cause of death for children under the age of five. Most children drown in their own

backyard swimming pool, but others drown in buckets, bathtubs, toilets, dog water bowls, canals and ponds. Small children are top-heavy, and don't have the upper body strength to lift themselves out of one of these dangerous situations. Even if the child survives the incident, they are often left with permanent brain damage.

Drowning and near drowning can be prevented, and you can help! Anyone involved with the supervision of children needs to be aware of the dangers associated with any body of water. Below are important tips to prevent needless tragedies.

- Know where your children are at all times.
- Use an approved barrier to separate the pool from the house.
- Never allow children to be alone near a pool or any water source!
- Have life-saving devices near the pool, such as a pole/hook, or flotation device.
- Keep large objects such as tables, chairs, toys and ladders away from pool fences.
- Post the 911 number on the phone.
- Do not allow children to play near the pool and store toys outside the pool area.
- If you leave the pool area, always take the children with you.
- Always have a "designated child watcher"
- Learn to swim.
- Never swim alone, or while under the influence of alcohol or medications.
- Never swim when thunder or lightning is present.
- Never dive into unfamiliar or shallow bodies of water.

BBQ Safety Tips

Before Barbecuing:

- Check your grill thoroughly for leaks, cracking or brittleness before use.
- Check the tubes leading to the burner regularly for blockages. Check with your specific grill manufacturer's instructions.
- Make sure the grill is at least **10 feet** away from your house, garage or trees.
- Store and use your grill on a large flat surface that cannot burn (i.e., concrete or asphalt).
- Don't use grills in a garage, porch, deck or on top of anything that can catch on fire. Never use a propane barbecue grill on a balcony, terrace or roof, as it is dangerous and illegal.
- Keep children **away** from fires and grills. It is a good idea to establish a safety zone around the grill and instruct children to remain outside the zone. A chalk line works great for this purpose.

- Have a fire extinguisher, a garden hose attached to a water supply, or at least 16-quarts of water close by in case of fire.
- Before getting a propane cylinder filled, check for any damages to it.
- Never transport or store propane cylinders in the trunk of your automobile.

During Barbecuing:

- Don't wear loose clothing that could catch fire.
- Use long-handled barbecue tools and/or flame resistant mitts.
- Never use any flammable liquid other than a BBQ starter fluid to start or freshen a fire.
- Never pour or squirt starter fluid onto an open flame. The flame can easily flashback along the fluid's path to the container in your hands.
- Keep alcoholic beverages away from the grill, as they are flammable.
- Never leave the grill unattended.

BBQ Safely:

- When lighting your propane BBQ, make sure all the connections are secure and open the lid and strike your match or lighter BEFORE turning on the gas.
- ALWAYS shut off the propane fuel at the grill and at the bottle after you have finished barbecuing. Otherwise, this will lead to fire hazards, such as leaks and faulty regulators.
- Store your BBQ and propane cylinder outdoors.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the safe use, cleaning and maintenance of your BBQ.
- Test your cylinder for leaks on a regular basis. When testing for leaks, never use matches or an open flame. Use soapy water or a leak detector.
- Store your cylinder away from heat and insert a safety plug on the valve.

After Barbecuing:

- Always follow the manufacturer's cleaning and storing instructions that accompany the grill.
- Keep your grill clean and free of grease buildup that may lead to a fire.
- Never store liquid or pressurized fuels inside your home and/or near any possible sources of flame.

In Case of BBQ Fire:

- For Propane Grills, turn off the burners. For Charcoal Grills, close the grill lid. For Electric Grills, disconnect the power.
- For Propane Grills, if you can safely reach the tank valve, shut it off.
- If the fire involves the tank, leave it alone, evacuate the area and call the fire department.

- If there is any type of fire that either threatens your personal safety or endangers property, **ALWAYS DIAL 911**.
- NEVER attempt to extinguish a grease fire with water. It will only cause the flames to flare up. Use an approved portable fire extinguisher.