

Home Fire Safety Guide

This checklist is designed to help homeowners determine areas of a home that need to be checked for fire safety concerns. This check list does not represent all of the areas of a home that need to be checked or maintained.

The United States has one of the highest fire death and injury rates in the world. In 1992, fire was the third leading cause of preventable deaths at home. Every year there are more than 400,000 home fires serious enough to be reported to local fire departments. According to the National Fire Protection Agency Fires account for roughly \$4 billion in property losses annually, and the long-term damage to fire victims and their loved ones is incalculable.

You can use this fire safety checklist to increase your awareness of how fires can occur. By spotting hazards and taking some simple precautions, most fires and fire-related injuries can be prevented.

Sources of Fire

Home heating equipment is associated with nearly a third of all home fires. Hundreds of injuries and deaths each year result from contact burns and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Wood Stoves

- Is your wood stove installed away from combustible walls?
 - Does a non-combustible floor protector extend 18 inches beyond your wood stove on all sides, to reduce the chances of your floor igniting?
 - Has your stove and its installation met fire and building codes?
 - Has your chimney recently been inspected and cleaned by a professional chimney sweep if necessary to avoid buildup of flammable creosote?
 - Do you use and maintain fires in your stove only as recommended by the manufacturer?
 - Do you burn only recommended fuels?
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Kerosene Heaters

- Purchase only kerosene heaters that bear the mark of an independent testing laboratory.
- Do you know if your local and state codes and regulations allow the use of kerosene heaters? (Ask your fire marshal.)
- Do you know to burn kerosene only, and never to mix even the slightest bit of gasoline or any other fuel with kerosene in your heater?
- Are your fuel containers properly labeled to reduce the chance of mistaking gasoline for kerosene?
- Are you careful always to use K1 kerosene? Other grades contain more sulfur and will increase emissions, endangering your health.

- Are you careful never to fill the heater while it is operating or still hot? Refueling outdoors, when the device has cooled will prevent spillage which could ignite or ignition from the hot surface.
 - Is your heater placed where it will not be knocked over or block an escape route in the event of a fire?
 - Is the heater in a room which is well ventilated (an open door or window is enough) to prevent indoor air pollution?
 - Do you carefully keep anything that can burn, such as fabrics and flammable liquids at least 3 feet away from an open flame?
 - Do you know how to activate the manual shut-off switch if a flare-up occurs? Never try to move the heater or smother the flames with a rug or blanket.
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Gas-Fueled Space Heaters

- Did you follow the manufacturer's instructions for where and how to use unvented gas space heaters?
 - Are you aware it is dangerous to use unvented gas space heaters in bathrooms and bedrooms?
 - Do you follow the manufacturer's instructions for igniting the pilot light? Gas vapors can accumulate and ignite explosively.
 - If matches are needed to light the pilot, do you strike the match before you turn on the gas, in order to prevent gas buildup?
 - Do you keep all flammable and combustible materials at least 3 feet away from gas-fueled appliances?
 - Is there a propane gas cylinder stored in the body of your propane heater or anywhere in your house? This practice is very dangerous and generally prohibited in the United States.
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Cooking Equipment

- Do you keep constant watch on anything that is cooking?
 - Are pot holders, plastic utensils, and dish towels hung or stored away from your cooking range? These items can catch fire.
 - Do you enforce a "kid-free zone" three feet around your range?
 - Do you roll up long, loose sleeves or fasten them with pins when you are cooking?
 - Do you store candy or cookies somewhere other than above your range? This will reduce the temptation kids feel to climb on cooking equipment.
 - Are you careful never to use a chair as a step stool in the kitchen, especially when your range is operating?
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Cigarette Lighters and Matches

- Do you keep lighters and matches out of sight and reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet?
- Do you make sure that cigarette butts are cold before emptying ashtrays?

- Do you check furniture where smokers have been sitting for unintentionally dropped smoking materials? (Dropped cigarette butts can smolder for hours before igniting.)
 - Are you careful to use deep sturdy ashtrays and to place them on sturdy surfaces where they are unlikely to be knocked over and to avoid placing them on the arms of chairs or sofas where they can be knocked off?
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Early Warning and Escape from Fires

Even when you comply with every item on this checklist, you should have a plan for early warning and escape in case a fire happens.

Smoke Detectors

- Do you have at least one working smoke detector on every floor of your home including the basement?
 - Are your smoke detectors properly installed and maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions?
 - Have you checked your smoke detectors' batteries lately?
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Escape Plan

- Does every member of your family know your plan for escape in the event of fire?
- Does everyone know at least two ways out of each room?
- Have you agreed on a meeting place in front of your home where you will gather to wait for the fire department?
- Does everyone know to get to **get out first**, then call for help from a neighbor's phone or call box?
- Does everyone understand that they should never, ever go back inside a burning building?
- Has your family practiced escaping through smoke by getting down on hands and knees and crawling to the nearest exit? (Make sure everyone understands that they should use the exit "free from smoke or flames if they can.)
- Does everyone in your family know how to stop, drop, and roll on the ground to smother flames if clothes catch fire?