

## **Fire Prevention Safety Tips**

**According to the National Fire Protection Association, Every 20 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the nation.**

- 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.
- 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.

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.