

Safe Practices and Preventing a Fire in the Home



U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Document #559 022008

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There are more than 300,000 residential fires a year. Working smoke alarms are a key factor in surviving a fire, but safe practices in the home are the first line of defense in preventing a fire from ever starting. Many residential fires and fire-related deaths are preventable. A fire can occur in anyone's home and does not discriminate against age, race, or education.

The type of structure and the furnishings in a home play key roles in the type and progression of fire. It is difficult to accurately predict the type of fire that might occur in your home, but some simple safety steps can help reduce the risk of fire and better protect your family.

Safety Around Cooking Appliances

Cooking equipment accounts for the largest percentage of residential fires. Because of oils used these fires are most often flaming fires. However, normal cooking can also produce steam, smoke, and fumes that set off alarms. Disabling a smoke alarm to silence frequent nuisance alarms could be a fatal mistake. Instead, moving the smoke alarm farther away from the cooking appliance may help prevent nuisance alarms and still provide adequate detection of the small fast moving fires that occur in the kitchen.



The CPSC staff suggests taking the following steps to prevent cooking fires in the home:

- Always keep an eye on food being heated. Unattended cooking causes the majority of fires in the kitchen. If you leave the kitchen, set a timer to remind you that something is on the stove.
- Keep children away from appliances when cooking. Have a “kid-free zone” around the stove and teach youngsters not to play in that area.
- Roll-up sleeves or, if possible, wear short or tight fitting sleeves when cooking. Loose fitting clothing and sleeves can be dangerous near open flames.
- Try not to reach over the stove. You can avoid this by not storing items you use directly over or behind the stovetop.
- Turn handles inward so pots and pans won't be pulled or knocked off the stove.

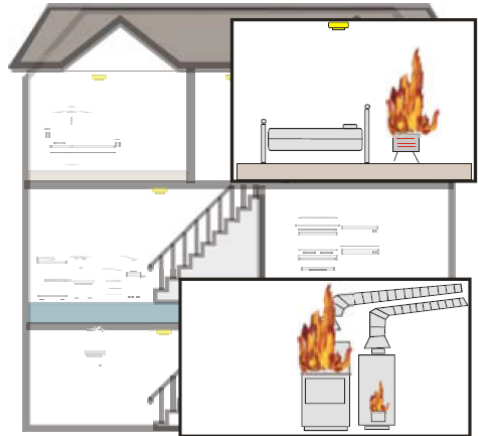
Safe Practices and Preventing a Fire in the Home (continued)

Check Heating and Cooling Equipment

Heating and cooling equipment fires constitute the second largest share of residential fires. Home heating equipment includes central heating units, portable and stationary space heaters, fireplaces, chimneys, and heat transfer systems, as well as some devices not used to heat living spaces, most notably water heaters.

The CPSC staff suggests taking the following steps to prevent heating and cooling appliance fires in the home:

- Have a professional technician inspect your heating, cooling, and water appliances annually.
- Have the fireplace chimney checked and cleaned routinely by a chimney “sweep” at least once a year.
- Do not leave a portable heater operating unattended or operating while sleeping. Portable electric air heaters are designed for use only as temporary supplemental heating and only while attended.
- Look for portable heaters that are listed by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory. These heaters have been tested to meet specific safety standards, and manufacturers are required to provide important use and care information to the consumer.

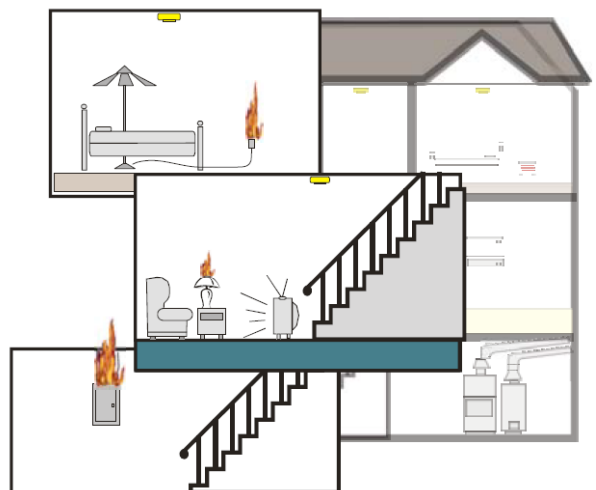


Check Electrical Cords and Lighting

Electrical fires from wiring and lighting are the third leading cause of residential fires. Fire deaths are highest in winter months which call for more indoor activities and an increase in lighting, heating, and appliance use. Most electrical fires result from problems with installed wiring such as faulty electrical outlets and old wiring. Problems with cords and plugs, such as extension and appliance cords, also cause many home electrical fires.

The CPSC staff suggests taking the following steps to prevent electrical fires in the home:

- Do not use any electrical cord that is stiff or cracked. The insulation on electrical cords can become damaged by wear, flexing, or age.
- Inspect electrical cords for frayed wires, which can cause fires. Replace all worn, old or damaged cords immediately.
- Install additional receptacles where needed. Extension cords should never be used as a long-term solution to the need for installing additional receptacles.



Safe Practices and Preventing a Fire in the Home (continued)

- Never use damaged electrical cords. Cords can become damaged when run under rugs or furniture.
- Keep combustibles away from light bulbs. Light bulbs, especially halogen types, get very hot and can ignite combustible materials that get too close.
- Never place clothing or towels on top of a lampshade. Do not use table lamps without a shade where they might fall over onto a bed or sofa.
- Use the correct wattage bulb for the fixture. Most light fixtures are labeled to show the type of and highest wattage bulb that can be safely used in that fixture; too high a wattage bulb can cause the fixture to overheat and start a fire.

Safety Around Upholstered Furniture and Mattresses

Upholstered furniture and mattresses and bedding are the items first ignited and involved in the greatest numbers of fire deaths. These items are commonly ignited by open flame products (such as candles, cigarette lighters, and matches) or smoking materials (primarily cigarettes). Young children playing with matches and lighters are often involved in starting these fires and, unfortunately, are also their primary victims.



The CPSC staff suggests taking the following steps to prevent fires in the home:

- Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of young children.
- Exercise caution when using candles. Do not leave candles unattended or lit while sleeping.
- Candles should be kept away from combustibles. Extinguish candles when you leave the room. If power is out, consider using flashlights instead.
- Never smoke in bed and extinguish tobacco products when tired.
- Use an ash tray when smoking.