



Charting Your Course to Home Ownership

Protect Your Home From Fire

Thousands of lives and billions of dollars are lost every year because people didn't take simple safety precautions to prevent fires in the home. It's up to you to protect yourself and your family. Doing these five things can save your home and loved ones:

- Plan fire escape routes.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Keep fire extinguishers handy.
- Have heating and electrical equipment inspected regularly.
- Use extreme caution with flame, flammable products and heaters.

Make a fire escape plan with your family. Prepare a floor plan of your home showing at least **two** ways out of each room. You should:

- Agree on a fixed location out-of-doors where family members are to gather for a head count. Make certain that no one goes back inside.
- Feel doors for heat before opening them. Do not open if hot.
- Crawl low (to avoid thick smoke and high temperatures).
- Stop, drop and roll (don't run) if clothes catch fire.
- Get out and stay out. Remember "Once out – stay out!"
- Phone the fire department from a neighbor's home
- Hold family fire drills twice each year.
- Practice - Practice - Practice!

Install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors

Most fatal home fires happen when people are asleep. Poisonous gases and smoke produced by fires numb the senses and put you into a deeper sleep. Inexpensive detectors save lives by alerting you in time to escape.

Every home should have at least one smoke detector (alarm) for each level of the home. Because smoke rises, mount smoke alarms high on a wall or ceiling. Do not place them in kitchens, bathrooms or garages where cooking fumes, steam or exhaust could set them off. There are many different brands of smoke alarms available on the market but they fall under two basic types: ionization and photoelectric.



Ionization alarms sound more quickly when a flaming, fast moving fire occurs. **Photoelectric alarms** are quicker at sensing smoldering, smoky fires. There are also combination smoke alarms that combine ionization and photoelectric into one unit, called **dual sensor smoke alarms**.

Because both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms are better at detecting distinctly different yet potentially fatal fires, and because home owners cannot predict what type of fire might start in a home, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) recommends the installation of both ionization and photoelectric or dual sensor smoke alarms.

In addition to the basic types of alarms, there are alarms made to meet the needs of people with hearing disabilities. These alarms may use strobe lights that flash and/or vibrate to assist in alerting those who are unable to hear standard smoke alarms when they sound. Test existing smoke alarms to make sure they are still working.

Homes with fuel-burning heaters or appliances (including a fireplace) or an attached garage should have at least one carbon monoxide (CO) detector/alarm, preferably installed in the sleeping area. Look for models with an alarm that stops within minutes of fresh air clearing out the CO, a manual hush or reset button, a digital display or warning light, a power indicator light, a test button and a UL or AGA listing. Carbon monoxide detectors can be used as a backup *but not as a replacement* for proper use and maintenance of your fuel-burning appliances. CO detector technology is still being developed and the detectors are not generally considered to be as reliable as the smoke detectors found in homes today. You should not choose a CO detector solely on the basis of cost; do some research on the different features available.

Carbon monoxide detectors should meet Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) standards, have a long-term warranty, and be easily self-tested and reset to ensure proper functioning. For maximum effectiveness during sleeping hours, CO detectors should be placed close to sleeping areas.

If your CO detector goes off, you should:

- Make sure it is the CO detector and not the smoke alarm.
- Check to see if any member of your household is experiencing symptoms.
- If they are, get them out of the house immediately and seek medical attention. If no one is feeling symptoms, ventilate the home with fresh air and turn off all potential sources of CO. Have a qualified technician inspect your fuel-burning appliances and chimneys to make sure they are operating correctly.

Keep Fire Extinguishers Handy

Every home needs several fire extinguishers. Different types of extinguishers are made for different uses. Fires are classified by letter with “A” referring to fires of ordinary combustibles like paper, clothes, etc.; “B” fires involve flammable liquids; “C” fires involve electrical equipment.

The numbers in the UL designation indicate the capacity or size of the fire they can fight. The higher the number, the larger the capacity. A large all-purpose full-floor model (such as one rated 3-A:40-B:C) is the most important type to have. An A:B:C extinguisher can be used with any type of fire, but it’s less effective for grease fires than a B:C type. So, it is best to keep a small B:C extinguisher

on hand in the kitchen and larger all-purpose models in halls and other needed locations.

Inspect Heating and Electrical Equipment Regularly

- Have your furnace professionally cleaned, adjusted and inspected every year before turning it on. Also have all chimneys and exhaust flues checked for cracks and blockage. Carbon monoxide detectors can alert you to problems between professional inspections and to other sources of CO leakage (backdrafting in certain conditions, auto exhaust, etc.)
- Circuit breakers or fuses protect electrical wiring and prevent fires. If they are tripped or blown, find and correct the source of the problem. Use only proper fuse sizes for replacements.
- Avoid overloading circuits by limiting the number of high-wattage electrical appliances on each circuit.
- Extension cords cannot carry as much electricity as permanent wiring, so it is especially important not to overload them.
- Old houses may need rewiring by a licensed electrician.
- Replace frayed electrical cords, damaged plugs and unreliable appliances.
- Disconnect appliances when they are not being used.

Use Extreme Caution with Flame, Flammables and Heaters

Remember and remind your family of these safety guidelines:

- Never smoke in bed or when you are drowsy. Provide large, deep, non-tip ashtrays for smokers. Before going to bed or leaving home, check for smoldering butts where people have been smoking.
- Keep fuel-burning space heaters and wood stoves at least three feet away from anything that can burn.
- Always turn unvented space heaters (those without an exhaust pipe to the outdoors) off before going to bed or leaving home.
- Never leave children alone near a working fireplace, wood stove or space heater.
- Refuel kerosene heaters only with kerosene, outside, after the heater has cooled.
- Replacing very old portable space heaters may be a good idea. Newer heaters manufactured in 1990 or later, have been found to be much safer in independent tests.
- Use a metal fire screen on your fireplace. Make sure the damper is open before starting a fire, and keep it open as long as embers are still smoldering. Clean your chimney each year if creosote has built up. Use only dry seasoned hardwood in a fireplace or wood stove.
- Store flammable liquids, insecticides and paint in their original, labeled containers with tight-fitting lids far away from appliances, pilot lights and other sources of heat or flame. Never smoke near flammable liquids. Store gasoline outside your home or in a detached garage. Never store a propane cylinder indoors.

- Kitchen fires can get out of hand quickly. If a small fire starts in a pan, carefully slide a lid over the pan to smother the flames and turn off the burner. Never pour water on a grease fire!

For Homes in Rural or Suburban Areas:

Living near wild lands means you live near forests or grasslands that naturally burn. To protect your home and family from wildfire, you should:

- Clean up your yard. Rake leaves, pine straw and grass clippings and use them for garden mulch
- Trim dead tree limbs. Trim and remove thick shrubs and tall trees away from your home
- Create a 30-foot green grass or nonburnable area around your home
- Plant shrubs and trees next to your home that do not easily burn
- Stack firewood 50 feet from your house
- Remove leaves and pine straw from your roof and gutters
- Remove things under your deck that may burn
- Make your house number easy for firefighters to see from the street
- Have a plan in case wildfire threatens your home

A forest cannot be “fireproof,” but as a home owner you can manage the vegetation around you home to create open space for protection and use fire resistant building materials when building or improving your home.

<p>Adapted from: Reichel, C. (1998). <i>Your Path to Home Ownership</i>. Baton Rouge, La.; LSU AgCenter.</p>	
<p>Additional Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firewise Communities. (2008). <i>Where we live. How we live</i>. Retrieved on April 5, 2008 from http://www.firewise.org/ • National Safety Council. (2004). <i>Carbon Monoxide</i>. Retrieved on April 5, 2008 from http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/carbmono.htm • United States Fire Association. (2008). <i>Smoke Alarms</i>. Retrieved on April 5, 2008 from http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/all_citizens/home_fire_prev/alarms/ • University of Oklahoma Police Department. (2008). <i>The Police Notebook on Fire Safety</i>. Retrieved on April 5, 2008 from http://www.ou.edu/oupd/fireprev.htm 	
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