



Fire hazards, home

The primary cause of home fires is space heaters. Other common causes include careless smoking, children playing with matches, faulty or overloaded wiring and electric circuits, electric blankets, dry Christmas trees and tree lights. Following the simple measures listed here can help you prevent or minimize the potential of fire.

Space heaters

Avoid using space heaters whenever possible. If you must use them, the Consumer Product Safety Commission suggests the following:

- Choose a space heater that has been tested and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory. These heaters must meet specific safety standards.
- Select space heaters that have a metal guard outside the flame area or heating element. Place the heater on a level, solid and non-flammable surface, not on rugs or carpets. Keep the heater at least 3 feet from bedding, drapes, furniture or other flammable materials.
- Never leave a space heater on when you go to sleep and never leave one close to a sleeping person.
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters and turn them off when you leave the room.
- Use heavy-duty, rather than light-weight, extension cords.
- If you have a kerosene, gas or oil space heater, or any space heater that uses a flame, use a carbon monoxide (CO) monitor to detect any leaks that might result from a malfunction. CO monitors can be purchased at most hardware stores; install one outside each bedroom.
- Always use appropriate fuel.
- Store flammable liquids away from heaters, furnaces, water heaters and ranges.
- Have gas and kerosene space heaters inspected annually.

Electrical system and equipment

- Replace any electrical cords that are cracked, frayed or get hot during use.
- Use the appropriate size of electrical cord for the job.
- Never overload electrical outlets or extension cords.
- If a fuse blows or a circuit breaker trips, find out why and fix the problem immediately.
- Always use fuses that are the right size and amperage.

- Have electrical appliances repaired if they blow a fuse/circuit breaker, emit a burning smell, or you feel a shock when you touch them.

Smoking

Never smoke in bed, (or when you lie on a sofa or other pieces of furniture), especially if you are feeling drowsy. It is always safest to smoke outside and extinguish all smoking materials completely before leaving the area.

Christmas trees and lights

- Buy only fresh trees or switch to an artificial tree made of nonflammable material. Shedding needles and brittle branches are a fire hazard.
- Keep Christmas trees away from heat sources.
- Don't decorate metal trees with electric lights, since a cut in light cords can produce a shock. Use colored floodlights instead.
- Make sure plastic trees are fire resistant. Keep them away from heat sources.
- Use only UL-approved tree lights.
- Keep lights from touching tree needles, branches, curtains or other materials that might catch fire.
- Disconnect lights from wall outlet when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Do not dispose of your cut tree by burning it in the fireplace.

Children

Children should be taught that fire is NOT a toy and can cause serious harm. At home, children often play with lighters or matches in their bedrooms, in closets, and under beds; anywhere they may hide when they play. Children of all ages set over 35,000 fires annually and every year more than 400 children younger than 10 years of age die in home fires. Keep matches and lighters locked up and away from children. Check under beds and inside closets for burnt matches or other evidence that your child may be playing with fire.

Final note

Take the time to do a safety assessment of your home. Remove materials that pose a hazard and replace old, worn electrical equipment. Smoke outside whenever possible and never smoke in bed. Contact your fire department for more information on fire prevention in your home.

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