



Fires in the home

Residential fires are the second leading cause of accidental death in the United States each year. Approximately 4,000 people die in fires in their homes annually and thousands more are injured. Fire prevention should be everyone's first priority, but it also pays to know what to do should a fire occur.

Equipment you'll need

Smoke detectors

Smoke detectors can double your chances of surviving a fire, but they must be properly maintained.

- Use smoke detectors approved by the Underwriter Laboratories (UL); look for the UL seal.
- Test the smoke detector monthly by pushing the test button or using an approved smoke substitute.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance and cleaning of the detector. Excessive dust, cobwebs, grease or other material may impair the detector's sensitivity. Vacuum the grill work of the detectors monthly or as suggested by the manufacturer.
- Change the batteries yearly or sooner if you here a "chirping" sound. New Year's Day, or when you reset your clocks in the spring or fall for daylight savings time, are good times to remember to change the batteries. Some smoke alarms come with long-life, 10-year batteries, but these long-life alarms also should be tested monthly. (Keep extra batteries on hand at all times.)

Proper placement of smoke detectors will assure the greatest possible protection.

- Install a smoke detector on every level of the home.
- Place detectors outside all sleeping areas, inside bedrooms and in living and family rooms. For extra safety, install smoke alarms both inside and outside sleeping areas.
- Place basement detectors close to the stairway leading to the floor above, but not at the top of the basement stairs.
- Avoid placing detectors in the kitchen, where they may be activated by cooking smoke, or near bathrooms where they may be activated by steam.
- Smoke detectors should be mounted on walls four to 12 inches from the ceiling or on ceilings as close to the center of the room as possible.

Fire extinguishers

A portable fire extinguisher can help prevent loss of life or property by putting out or containing small fires until the fire department arrives. However, the first priority is for people in the dwelling to get out safely. Also, there are specific guidelines for the safe use of fire extinguishers:

Portable extinguishers are also rated for the size of fire they can handle; the larger the number printed on the product, the larger the fire. However, the larger the number, the heavier the extinguisher, so be sure the size is reasonable for the situation and the people who may have to use it. Fire extinguishers should be routinely inspected and serviced. Reusable models need to be re-charged after use. Disposable models can be used only once and must be replaced when they are 12 years old. (Write down the date of purchase and tape it to your extinguisher.)

- Fire extinguishers should be placed in plain view, near an escape route, and away from potential fire hazards such as heating appliances.
 - To operate a fire extinguisher if fire breaks out, remember the word PASS:
 - **Pull** the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you, and release the locking mechanism.
 - **Aim** low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
 - **Squeeze** the lever slowly and evenly.
 - **Sweep** the nozzle from side-to-side.
- Never use a fire extinguisher on a large or spreading fire.
- Always use the appropriate size and type of extinguisher for the fire. (Read the product's label for this information.)
- When using the extinguisher, be sure that everyone has left or is leaving the building, and that your back is to a safe and unobstructed exit where the fire won't spread.
- When using an extinguisher, always aim at the base of the flames.
- After you have extinguished the fire, have the fire department check the site to assure the fire is out.

Fire extinguishers come rated as A, B, C, and D according to the type of fires they put out, so it is very important to use the appropriate fire extinguisher. For instance, using a water type of extinguisher on a grease or electrical fire can spread the fire or cause electrocution. Also available are combination extinguishers that can be safely used on several types of fires.

- Class A extinguishers will put out fires in ordinary combustibles, such as wood and paper. The numerical rating for this class of fire extinguisher refers to the amount of water the fire extinguisher holds and the amount of fire it will extinguish.
- Class B extinguishers should be used on fires involving flammable liquids, such as grease, gasoline, oil, etc. The numerical rating for this class of fire extinguisher states the approximate number of square feet of a flammable liquid fire that a non-expert person can expect to extinguish.

- Class C extinguishers are suitable for use on electrically energized fires. This class of fire extinguishers does not have a numerical rating. The presence of the letter "C" indicates that the extinguishing agent is non-conductive.
- Class D extinguishers are designed for use on flammable metals and are often specific for the type of metal in question. There is no picture designator for Class D extinguishers. These extinguishers generally have no rating nor are they given a multi-purpose rating for use on other types of fires.

Many extinguishers available today can be used on different types of fires and will be labeled with more than one designator, e.g. A-B, B-C, or A-B-C. Make sure that if you have a multi-purpose extinguisher it is properly labeled.

Fire evacuation plan

Having a predetermined and rehearsed fire evacuation plan dramatically improves your chances of surviving a fire. Many fires happen at night, when sleepiness, darkness, smoke and fear can hinder people's ability to make effective decisions.

Your plan should include:

- Two ways to exit each room
- An easy and safe way to escape through upstairs windows if necessary
- A predetermined outside meeting place for all household members
- Arrangements to call 911 from a neighbor's house once everyone has gotten out of the burning building

If emergency ladders are needed, it is important that all household members practice setting them up and using them.

In case of a fire

If you are unable to extinguish the fire:

- Stay close to the floor, where the air is cooler.
- When a fire occurs, do not waste any time saving property. Take the safest exit route and move quickly.
- If a closed door is warm to touch, do not open it. Use another exit.
- If your clothes catch fire, DROP and ROLL on the ground to smother the flames. DO NOT RUN!
- Close doors behind you as you exit the house. (Closed doors slow fires.)
- If a door is hot and there is no other way of escape, seal the bottoms of the doors with clothing, blankets or sheets. Keep windows closed. Stay low to the ground while you wait for help.

Final note

Practice in advance what to do if a fire occurs in your home. Know your escape routes and train all family members how to use them. For further information on preventing and surviving fire, contact your local fire department.

Call CareWise! 1-888-318-9473 or go to www.eCareWise.com

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