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Your Home Fire Safety Checklist

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Introduction

The United States has one of the highest fire death and injury rates in the world. Fire—in the form of flames and smoke—is the second leading cause of accidental death in the home.

More than 4,000 people die each year in home fires. Every year, there are more than 500,000 residential fires serious enough to be reported to fire departments. More than 90 percent of residential fire deaths and injuries result from fires in one and two family houses and apartments. Property losses exceed 4 billion dollars annually, and the long-term emotional damage to victims and their loved ones is incalculable.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has targeted the principal consumer products associated with fires, namely home heating devices, upholstered furniture, bedding, cigarette lighters, matches, and wearing apparel. The Commission is participating in a special congressionally authorized study of cigarette-ignited fires, which cause more deaths than any other kind of fire. The Commission continues to push for extensive use of smoke detectors. With the help of concerned consumers, the number of residential fires has declined about 30 percent since 1980.

The CPSC is fulfilling its role to make products inherently more fire safe. We recognize that an alert and informed public can do much more to cut down on the needlessly high and tragic fire toll. Many of the injuries associated with flammable products result from hazards that are overlooked. Fire experts agree that one key to fewer fires is a greater awareness of how accidents can be prevented. Spotting these hazards and taking some simple precautions can prevent many fires and fire-related injuries.

Use this checklist as a safety guide to spot possible fire safety problems, which may be present in your home. It is a first step in reducing the risk of fire. Check YES or NO to answer each question. If you check NO to any question, the potential hazard should be corrected to avoid the risk of injury or death. How safe is your home from fire?

PRODUCT SAFETY, IT'S NO ACCIDENT!

Sources of Fire:

Supplemental Home Heating

The use of supplemental room heaters, such as wood and coal burning stoves, kerosene heaters, gas space heaters and electrical heaters has decreased, along with the number of residential fires.

Even though there has been a decrease in fires associated with supplemental heaters, it is important to remember that about 120,000 residential fires still occur annually with the use of these heaters, or about 22 percent of all residential fires. These fires kill more than 600 people. Annually there are thousands of contact burn injuries and hundreds of carbon monoxide poisonings.

Wood Stoves

You should be able to respond, “yes” to the following safety statements.

1. The wood stove or fireplace has been installed according to existing building codes and manufacturer’s instructions. **Yes or No.**
2. The chimney and stovepipe are checked frequently during the heating season for creosote buildup and are cleaned when necessary. **Yes or No**
3. The stove sits on a non-combustible or on a code-specified or listed floor protector. **Yes or No**
4. Combustibles such as curtains, chairs, firewood, etc., are at least three feet away from the stove. **Yes or No**
5. Only proper fuel is used in the stove. **Yes or No**
6. A metal container with a tight-fitting lid is used for ash removal. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Do not use wood burning stoves and fireplaces unless they are properly installed and meet building codes.
- Follow the label instructions on the stove, which recommends an inspection twice monthly. Have chimneys inspected and cleaned by a professional chimney sweep. Creosote is an unavoidable product of wood burning stoves. Creosote builds up in chimney flues and can cause a chimney fire. To cut down on creosote buildup, avoid smoldering fires.
- Use a code-specified or listed floor protector. It should extend 18 inches beyond the stove on all sides. This will reduce the possibility of the floor being ignited.
- Follow the instructions on the stove label for proper location of the stove from combustible walls.
- Never burn trash in a stove because this could over heat the stove. Gasoline and other flammable liquids should never be used to start wood stove fires. Gasoline will ignite and explode. Use coal only if designated as appropriate by the manufacturer.

Kerosene Heaters

You should be able to respond, “yes” to the following safety statements.

1. Only 1-K kerosene is used and it is bought from a dealer who can certify that the product is 1-K kerosene. **Yes or No**
2. The heater is placed out of the path of traffic areas such as doorways and hallways.

Yes or No.

3. Kerosene is stored outdoors, and out of the reach of children in a tightly sealed, preferably blue plastic or metal container, labeled “kerosene.” **Yes or No**
4. No attempt is to be made to move the heater if flare-up (flames outside the heater cabinet) occurs. The fire department is called immediately. **Yes or No**
5. The heater is used in well-ventilated rooms. **Yes or No.**
6. The heater is turned off while sleeping and is never left operating unattended. **Yes or No**
7. The heater is placed at least three feet away from anything that might catch fire such as clothing, furniture, curtains, etc. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Check with your local fire marshal regarding local and state codes and regulations for using a kerosene heater.
- NEVER USE GASOLINE. Even small amounts of gasoline mixed with kerosene can increase the risk of fire.
- Use properly labeled containers. It reduces the likelihood of mistaking gasoline for kerosene.
- Place heater so it will not be knocked over or trap you in case of fire.
- Use I-K kerosene because. Grades other than I-K contain much more sulfur and will increase sulfur dioxide emissions, posing a possible health problem. If you buy kerosene from a gasoline station make sure you and/or the attendant are using the kerosene pump, not the gasoline pump.
- Never fill the heater while it is operating. Always refuel the heater outdoors to prevent spillage on floors and rugs, which could later result in fire ignition.
- Keep the room in which the heater operates ventilated (e.g. door open or the window ajar). This will prevent an indoor air pollution problem and minimize health problems. Kerosene heaters are not usually vented.
- Keep flammable liquids and fabrics away from an open flame.
- Never try to move the heater or try to smother the flames with a rug or a blanket if a flare-up occurs. Activate the manual shut-off switch and call the fire department. Moving the heater may increase the height of the flames and cause leakage resulting in personal injury.

Gas-Fired Space Heaters

You should be able to respond “yes” to the following safety statements.

1. Only vented heaters are installed or used in sleeping quarters. **Yes or No**
2. Vented heaters are properly vented to the outside. **Yes or No**
3. The unvented gas-fired room heater has a warning label and instructions that are followed. **Yes or No**
4. The unvented gas-fired room heater has a label stating it has a “pilot safety system”, which turns off the gas if not enough fresh air is available. **Yes or No**
5. The vented heater has a label stating that it is equipped with a vent safety shutoff system. **Yes or No**
6. If the heater uses liquefied petroleum (LP) gas, the container is located outside the house. **Yes or No**
7. The manufacturer’s instructions for lighting the pilot are followed. **Yes or No**
8. Matches are lighted before turning on the gas if pilot lighting is required. **Yes or No**
9. Flammable materials and liquids are kept away from gas heating appliances. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions regarding where and how to use gas space heaters. unvented heaters should not be used in small enclosed areas, especially bedrooms because of the

- potential for carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Do not use a propane heater (LP) which has a gas cylinder stored in the body of the heater. Its use is prohibited in most states and localities in the United States.
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for lighting the pilot. Gas vapors may accumulate and ignite explosively, burning your hand or face.
 - Light matches, if needed for lighting the pilot, before turning on the gas to prevent gas buildup.
 - Do not operate a vented style heater unvented. It could allow combustion products, including carbon monoxide, to reach dangerous levels which will result in illness and death.

Portable Electric Heaters

The Commission estimates that half the deaths and one-third of the injuries resulting from electric heater fires occurred at night when family members were asleep and the heater unattended. The Commission is also concerned about the use of power or extension cords which can be too small to supply the amount of current required by the typical portable electric heater.

You should be able to respond, "yes" to the following safety statements.

1. The heater is operated at least three feet away from upholstered furniture, drapes, bedding and other combustible materials. **Yes or No**
2. The extension cord (if used) is marked #14 or #12 American Wire Gauge (AWG).
Yes or No
3. The heater is used on the floor. **Yes or No**
4. The heater is turned off when family members leave the house or are sleeping. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Operate heater away from combustible materials. Do not place heaters where towels or the like could fall on the appliance and trigger a fire.
- Avoid using extension cords unless absolutely necessary. If you must use an extension cord with your electric heater, make sure it is marked with a power rating at least as high as that of the heater itself. Keep the cord stretched out. Do not permit the cord to become buried under carpeting or rugs. Do not place anything on top of the cord.
- Never place heaters on cabinets, tables, furniture or the like. Never use heaters to dry wearing apparel or shoes.

Cooking Equipment

Cooking equipment is estimated to be associated with more than 100,000 fires annually, and almost 400 deaths, and 5,000 injuries. Gas cooking equipment accounts for about 30,000 fires, and electric cooking equipment for about 55,000 fires.

You should be able to respond, "yes" to the following safety statements.

1. The storage area above the stove is free of flammable and combustible items. **Yes or No**
2. Short or tight fitting sleeves, and tight fitting shirts, robes, gowns, etc., are worn while cooking. **Yes or No**
3. Items that could attract children (e.g. cookies and candy) are not kept above the range and are kept out of the immediate area. **Yes or No**
4. The stove is not left unattended when cooking especially when the burner is turned to a high setting. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Never place or store pot holders, plastic utensils, towels and other non-cooking equipment on or near the range because these items can be ignited.
- Roll up or fasten long loose sleeves with pins or elastic bands while cooking. Do not reach across a range while cooking. Long loose sleeves are more likely to catch on fire than are short sleeves. Long loose sleeves are also more apt to catch on pot handles, overturning pots and pans and cause scalds.
- Do not place candy or cookies over top of ranges. This will reduce the attraction kids may have for climbing on cooking equipment, thus reducing the possibility of their clothing catching fire.
- Keep constant vigilance on any cooking that is require above the "keep warm" setting.

Cigarette Lighters and Matches

Each year more than 200 deaths are associated with fires started by cigarette lighters. About two thirds of these result from children playing with lighters. Most of the victims are under five years old.

You should be able to answer "yes" to the safety statements below.

1. Cigarette lighters and matches are kept out of the reach of children. **Yes or No**
2. Cigarette lighters are never used to entertain a child. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Keep lighters and matches out of sight and out of the reach of children. Children as young as two years old are capable of lighting cigarette lighters and matches.
- Never encourage or allow a child to play with a lighter or to think of it as a toy. Do not use it as a source of amusement for a child. Once their curiosity is aroused, children may seek out a lighter and try to light it.
- Always check to see that cigarettes are extinguished before emptying ashtrays. Stubs that are still burning can ignite trash.

Danger— Children and Lighters
KEEP CIGARETTE LIGHTERS AWAY FROM YOUNG CHILDREN

Materials That Burn

Your home is filled with materials and products that will burn if ignited. Upholstered furniture, clothing, drapery fabrics, and liquids such as gasoline and volatile solvents are involved in many injury-causing fires each year. Most of these fires could be prevented.

Upholstered Furniture

In 1989, there were 18,600 residential fires associated with upholstered furniture; about 900 people lost their lives. About one half of these fires were caused by smoking materials. Property losses amounted to over \$ 100 million from fires started by cigarette ignition of upholstered furniture. You should be able to respond, "yes" to the safety statements below.

1. Upholstered furniture fabrics made from vinyl, wool or thermoplastic fibers are generally selected for safety reasons. **Yes or No**
2. I check thoroughly after parties for ashes or unextinguished cigarettes that may have fallen behind and between cushions and under furniture. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Look for furniture designed to reduce the likelihood of furniture fire from cigarettes. Much of the furniture manufactured today has significantly greater resistance to ignition by cigarettes than upholstered furniture manufactured 10 to 15 years ago. This is particularly true of furniture manufactured to comply with the requirements of the Upholstered Furniture Action Council's (UFAC) Voluntary Action Program. Such upholstered furniture may be identified by the gold colored tag on the furniture item. The legend on the front of the tag in red letters states "Important Consumer Safety Information from UFAC."
- Always check the furniture where smokers have been sitting for improperly discarded smoking materials. Ashes and lighted cigarettes can fall unnoticed behind or between cushions or under furniture.
- Do not place or leave ashtrays on the arms of chairs where they can be knocked off.
- Look for fabrics made predominantly from thermo-plastic fibers (nylon, polyester, acrylic, olefin) because they resist ignition by burning cigarettes better than cellulosic fabrics (rayon or cotton). In general, the higher the thermoplastic content, the greater the resistance to cigarette ignition.

Mattresses and Bedding

Smoldering fires in mattresses and bedding materials caused by cigarettes are a major cause of deaths in residential fires. In 1989 over 35,000 mattress/bedding fires caused about 700 deaths.

You should be able to respond "yes" to the following safety statements.

1. "No smoking in bed" is a rule that is practiced in my home. **Yes or No**
2. Heaters, ash trays, smoking materials and other fire sources are located away from bedding. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- DO NOT smoke in bed. Smoking in bed is a major cause of accidental fire deaths in homes.
- Locate heaters or other fire sources three feet from the bed to prevent the bed catching on fire.
- Consider replacing your old mattress with a new one if you are a smoker. Mattresses manufactured since 1973 are required to resist cigarette ignition.

Wearing Apparel

Most fibers in clothing can burn, some more quickly than others. A significant number of clothing fires occur in the over 65 age group principally from nightwear (robes, pajamas, nightgowns). In 1989 about 200 clothing fire deaths were reported; about three fourths occurred in the 65 and older age group. The severity of apparel burns is high. Hospital stays average over one month.

Small open flames, including matches, cigarette lighters, and candles are the major sources of clothing ignition. These are followed by ranges, open fires and space heaters. The most commonly worn garments that are associated with clothing ignition injuries are pajamas, nightgowns, robes, shirts/blouses, pants/slacks and dresses.

You should be able to respond, "yes" to the following statements.

1. When purchasing wearing apparel I consider fiber content and fabric construction for safety purposes. **Yes or No**
2. I purchase garments for my children that are intended for sleepwear since they are made to be flame resistant. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Consider purchasing fabrics such as 100% polyester, nylon, wool and silk that are difficult to ignite and tend to self extinguish.
- Consider the flammability of certain fabrics containing cotton, cotton/polyester blends, rayon, and acrylic. These are relatively easy to ignite and burn rapidly.
- Look at fabric construction. It also affects ignitability. Tight weaves or knits and fabrics without a fuzzy or napped surface are less likely to ignite and burn rapidly than open knits or weaves, or fabrics with brushed or piled surfaces.
- Consider purchasing garments that can be removed without having to pull them over the head. Clothes that are easily removed can help prevent serious burns. If a garment can be quickly stripped off when it catches fire, injury will be far less severe or avoided altogether.
- Follow manufacturer's care and cleaning instructions on products labeled "flame resistant" to ensure that their flame resistant properties are maintained.

Flammable Liquids

One of the major causes of household fires is flammable liquids. These include gasoline, acetone benzene, lacquer thinner, alcohol, turpentine, contact cements, paint thinner, kerosene, and charcoal lighter fluid. The most dangerous of all is gasoline.

You should be able to respond, "yes" to the following safety statements.

1. Flammable liquids are stored in properly labeled, tightly closed non-glass containers. **Yes or No**
2. These products are stored away from heaters, furnaces, water heaters, ranges, and other gas appliances. **Yes or No**
3. Flammable liquids are stored out of reach of children. **Yes or No**

Recommendation:

- Take extra precautions in storing and using flammable liquids, such as gasoline, paint thinners, etc. They produce invisible explosive vapors that can ignite by a small spark at considerable distances from the flammable substance. Store outside the house.

Early Warning and Escape

Even when you have complied with every item in this Home Fire Safety Checklist, you still need to have a plan for early warning and escape in case a fire does occur. Many fire deaths and fire injuries are actually caused by smoke and gases. Victims inhale smoke and poisonous gases that rise ahead of the flames. Survival depends on being warned as early as possible and having an escape plan.

Smoke Detectors

You should be able to respond, “yes” to the following statements.

1. At least one smoke detector is located on every floor of my home. **Yes or No**
2. Smoke detectors are placed near bedrooms, either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall. **Yes or No**
3. Smoke detectors are tested according to manufacturer’s instructions on a regular basis (at least once a month) and are kept in working condition at all times. **Yes or No**
4. Batteries are replaced according to manufacturer’s instructions, at least annually. **Yes or No**
5. Batteries are never disconnected. **Yes or No**
6. The detector has a distinct warning signal that can be heard whether asleep or awake. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Purchase a smoke detector if you do not have one. Smoke detectors are inexpensive and are required by law in many localities. Check local codes and regulations before you buy your smoke detector because some codes require specific types of detectors. They provide an early warning which is critical because the longer the delay, the deadlier the consequences.
- Read the instructions that come with the detector for advice on the best place to install it. As a minimum detectors should be located near bedrooms and one on every floor.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for proper maintenance. Smoke detectors can save lives, but only if properly installed and maintained.
- Never disconnect a detector. Consider relocating the detector rather than disconnecting it if it is subject to nuisance alarms, e.g. from cooking.
- Replace the battery annually, or when a “chirping” sound is heard.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions about cleaning your detector. Excessive dust, grease or other material in the detector may cause it to operate abnormally. Vacuum the grill work of your detector.

Make sure detectors are placed either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall. Locate smoke detectors away from air vents or registers; high air flow or “dead” spots are to be avoided.

**PLACE ONE DETECTOR ON EVERY FLOOR
TEST YOUR DETECTOR MONTHLY**

Escape Plan

Planning ahead, rehearsing, thinking, and acting clearly are keys to surviving a fire. How prepared are you?

You should be able to respond, “yes” to the following statements.

1. The family has an escape plan and an alternate escape plan. **Yes or No**
2. Escape routes and plans are rehearsed periodically. **Yes or No**
3. The escape plan includes choosing a place safely outside the house where the family can meet to be sure everyone got out safely. **Yes or No**
4. At least two exits from each part of the house are established. **Yes or No**
4. The fire department number is posted on every telephone. **Yes or No**

Recommendations:

- Establish advanced family planning for escape. It is an important partner with smoke detectors and it will prepare you for a fire emergency.
- Include small children as a part of the discussion and rehearsal. It is especially important to make sure they understand that they must escape; they can't hide from fire under a bed or in a closet.

Your life and that of your family can be saved by foresight, planning, discussing and rehearsal.

PRODUCT SAFETY, IT'S NO ACCIDENT!

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

You may call the Commission's Hotline from anywhere in the continental U.S. by dialing 1-800-638-2772. A teletypewriter for the hearing impaired is also available (including Alaska and Hawaii) on a special Hotline number 1-800-638-8270. To order publications, write to the Office of Information and Public Affairs, Washington, DC 20207.

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