

10 Dos and Don'ts to Prevent Home Fires

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Property Casualty 360

Each year more than 2,500 people die and 12,600 are injured in home fires in the United States, with direct property loss due to home fires estimated at \$7.3 billion annually, according to Ready.gov.

Did you know that most home fires occur in the kitchen while cooking and are the leading cause of injuries from fire? Or, that common causes of fires at night are carelessly discarded cigarettes, sparks from fireplaces without spark screens or glass doors, and heating appliances left too close to furniture or other combustibles? These fires can be particularly dangerous because they may smolder for a long period before being discovered by sleeping residents.

Fire spreads quickly so there's no time to gather valuables or make a phone call. In just two minutes, a fire can become life-threatening. In five minutes, a residence can be engulfed in flames. Creating and practicing a family fire escape plan twice a year may save lives.

FEMA warns that heat and smoke from fire can be more dangerous than the flames. Inhaling the super-hot air can sear your lungs. Also, be aware that fire produces poisonous gases that make you disoriented and drowsy. Therefore, it's wise to be prepared in case a fire does occur in your home.

You're encouraged to share the following key dos and don'ts to help prepare and protect clients' and their families from the dangers of a household fire.

DO keep a smoke alarm on every level of your home. Half of home fire deaths happen between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. Stay safe with smoke alarms outside of every bedroom and each separate sleeping area.

DO address your needs. If you require eyeglasses, hearing aid, cane or a wheelchair, ensure they are next to your bed to quickly grab if necessary. If there is a fire, you may have less than three minutes to get out of your home. Be ready to act immediately.

DO make a fire escape plan that shows at least two ways out of every room. Identify a meeting place in the front of your home, to verify that everyone is safe and help firefighters ensure everyone exited safely.

In the event of a fire, remember that every second counts, so you and your family must always be prepared. Escape plans help you get out of your home quickly.

DO stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.

DO teach children not to hide from firefighters. Also, teach them to crawl low under any smoke to escape a burning structure. Heavy smoke and poisonous gases collect first along the ceiling.

Have children and family members practice feeling their way out of the house in the dark or with their eyes closed.

DON'T forget to test your smoke alarm every month. The risk of dying in a home fire is cut in half in homes with working smoke alarms. If your alarm doesn't sound when tested, it's time to replace it.

DON'T assume you'll hear the fire alarm if it sounds. If you test the alarm and can't hear it, consider getting a strobe light that will flash or a bed shaker that will shake when the smoke alarm sounds.

DON'T cook if you are sleepy, have been drinking alcohol, or have taken medicine that makes you drowsy.

DON'T smoke in bed! If you are sleepy, have been drinking, or have taken medicine that makes you drowsy, put your cigarette out first.

Also, never smoke in a home where oxygen is used, even if it is turned off. Oxygen can be explosive and makes fire burn hotter and faster.

DON'T stop to call 911 until you're safely outside and away from danger. Stay outside until the fire department says it's safe to go back inside.