

# Don't Get Burned

Pay attention to these safety tips this winter to reduce the chance of being a fire victim

By Pam Blair

Every 16 seconds, a fire department responds to a blaze somewhere in the United States.

While a fire can happen anywhere, the National Fire Protection Association estimates approximately 80 percent of U.S. fire deaths occur in the home. A third of those occur during the winter.

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires. Smoking materials, such as cigarettes, are the leading cause of home fire deaths. During the winter, heating equipment is the number-one cause of fire deaths.

Improper use of electricity can increase the risk of fire.

If an appliance smokes or has an unusual smell, unplug it immediately and have it serviced before using it again. Replace any electrical cord that is cracked or frayed.

Don't rely on extension cords to reach distant outlets. If you need more outlets, have them installed by a qualified professional.

Never run cords under carpets or secure them with nails or staples.

Don't tamper with your fuse box, or replace burnt-out fuses with ones that allow a higher current level.

If you are frequently replacing fuses or resetting circuit breakers, check the main electrical box to see what section of the house they serve.

Reduce the amount of electricity used in those areas by unplugging a few items or moving them to another room. If this doesn't help, have a professional inspect the system to determine why it is overloading.

If you have an older home, have the

wiring checked.

To reduce the chance of fire at your home, the National Fire Protection Association offers these additional tips:

- Cook carefully. Never leave the cooking area unattended when in use. Keep cooking areas clear of combustibles. When you cook, wear clothes with short or tight-fitting sleeves. Turn pot handles inward on the stove so you won't bump them and children can't grab them. If grease catches fire in a pan, slide a lid over the pan to smother the flames, and turn off the heat source. Keep the lid on until the pan is completely cooled.

- Give space heaters space. Keep portable and space heaters at least three feet away from anything that can burn. Keep children and pets away from heaters, and never leave heaters on when you leave home or go to bed.

- Clean the chimney and follow directions. Common causes of home heating fires include inadequate chimney cleaning and flaws in the design, installation or use of heating equipment.

- Keep an eye on smokers. Never smoke in bed or when you are drowsy. Use large, deep, non-tip ashtrays, and soak butts with water before discarding them. Before going to bed or leaving home after someone has been smoking, check for smoldering cigarettes under and around upholstered furniture.

- Don't play with fire. In a child's hand, matches and lighters can be deadly. Store them up high, where kids can't see or reach them—preferably in a locked cabinet. Teach children that matches and lighters are tools that



should be used only by adults, or with adult supervision.

- Keep combustibles away from heat sources. Don't store gasoline inside your home. Keep flammable liquids in their original containers and away from heat, sparks or flames. Don't keep newspapers or magazines near heat sources.

- Be prepared to put out a fire. Have an all-purpose fire extinguisher available and know how to use it.

## Fire Safety Tips

- Plan your escape. If a fire breaks out, you must get out fast. Sit down with your family and prepare an escape plan. Be sure everyone knows at least two unobstructed exits from each room. Install rope ladders by upstairs windows. Decide on a meeting place outside. Practice your



*A home is fully engulfed by flames. Photo courtesy of Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue.*

plan at least twice a year.

- Post your address. Make sure your address is clearly visible from the street for emergency personnel.

- Check the door. Before opening a closed door, use the back of your hand to feel the door knob and the space between the door and frame for signs of warmth. If it feels cool, slowly open the door, but be prepared to slam it shut if smoke is on the other side.

- Stay calm if you are trapped. If possible, go to a room with an outside window or balcony. Close all doors between you and the fire. Use tape or stuff a wet towel to fill cracks around doors, and cover vents to keep smoke out. If there is a phone in the room, call the fire department and tell them exactly where you are.

- Crawl low under smoke. During a fire, smoke and poisonous gases rise with the heat. The air is cleaner near the floor. If you must escape through smoke, crawl on your hands and knees to the nearest exit, keeping your head 12 to 24 inches above the floor.

- Stop, drop and roll. If your clothes catch on fire, don't run. Stop where you are, drop to the ground, cover your face with your hands, and roll over and over to smother the flames.

- Stay out. Once you are out of the burning building, don't go back inside.

## Smoke Detectors Improve Chances of Surviving a Fire

Each year, more than 6,000 people die and more than 300,000 are injured in residential fires. Many could have been avoided with a working smoke detector.

The peak period for home fires is 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., but the peak period for home fire deaths is midnight to 6 a.m.

Most people mistakenly believe a nighttime fire will wake them up. The truth is, odorless, toxic gases produced by a fire spread long before flames are visible or noisy.

You may not have enough time to escape. Worse yet, the gases may numb your senses, sending you into a deeper sleep.

Although smoke detectors don't prevent or put out fires, properly installed and maintained units buy you time to escape. Having at least one smoke detector in working order on every level of your home reduces your risk of death in a home fire by 50 percent.

Minimum protection requires units outside sleeping areas and on each level of the house. For maximum protection, put a smoke detector in every bedroom—especially if family members sleep with the door closed.

To keep your smoke detector in good working order:

- Test it at least once a month, and preferably weekly.

- Clean it regularly. Grease, dirt and dust can build up in the unit's vents.

- Replace the unit's batteries once or twice a year.

- Never disconnect a unit or borrow the batteries from a smoke detector.

- Replace all smoke detectors after 10 years.