

Residential Fires

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Fire Safety and Prevention

What to Do in Case of a Fire

What to Do After a Fire

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Fire safety and prevention are important for everyday emergencies, but they are crucial during disasters. More than 6,000 Americans die and 100,000 more are injured by fires each year. Fire spreads quickly. A fire's heat is more dangerous than the flames; inhaling super hot air can sear your lungs. Fires produce poisonous gases that make you drowsy and disoriented. In addition to those measures outlined in the General Family Preparedness section, the following fire specific measures should be followed.

Fire Safety and Prevention

1. Install smoke detectors in your house or apartment.

Place detectors on every level of your house: - outside bedrooms - at the top of open stairways or the bottom of enclosed stairs - near (but not in) the kitchen.

Clean smoke detectors regularly and replace batteries once a year.

2. Plan escape routes with your family. See the General Family Preparedness section of the Handbook.
3. Clean out storage areas. Don't let trash accumulate.
4. Check electrical wiring.

Inspect extension cords for frayed or exposed wires or loose plugs.

Do not overload extension cords or outlets.

5. Never use gasoline, benzine, naphtha or similar liquids indoors.

Never smoke near these flammable liquids.

Safely discard all rags or materials soaked in flammable material after use.

6. Check heating sources. Make sure they are clean and in working order.
7. Alternative heating sources such as wood, coal and kerosene should be used carefully.
8. Make sure that home insulation is not in contact with electrical wiring.
9. Know where your gas meter and central electrical panels are so you can shut them off in an emergency. If you shut off your gas line, allow only a gas company representative to turn it on again to make sure it is done properly.
10. Ask your local fire department to inspect your house for fire safety and prevention.
11. If you live in wildland areas, your house could be a target for wildfire.

Call local authorities and get information about wildfires in your area.

Do not install an untreated wood shake roof.

Make your landscape fire safe by removing excess brush and undergrowth, planting fire resistant plants, and pruning trees of low branches.

What to Do in Case of a Fire

1. To put out a small fire, take away its air or fuel, or cool it with water or fire extinguishing chemicals.
2. Never use water on an electrical fire. Use only a fire extinguisher.
3. Oil and grease fires occur primarily in the kitchen. Smother the flames with baking soda or salt or put a lid over the flame if it is burning in a pan.
4. Small fires can be controlled with water or fire extinguishers, but do not try to put out a fire which is getting out of control.
5. If your clothes catch on fire, stop, drop and roll until the fire is extinguished. Running only makes the fire burn faster.
6. Sleep with your door closed. If you wake up to the sound of a smoke detector, feel the door before you open it.

If the door is cool, leave immediately. Be prepared to bend low or crawl. Smoke and heat rise, and the air is cooler near the floor.

If the door is hot, escape through a window. If you cannot escape, hang a white or light-colored sheet outside the window to alert fire fighters of your presence.

What to Do After a Fire

1. Contact your insurance agent about estimates and loss coverage.
2. Do not enter a fire-damaged building unless authorities have given you permission.
3. When entering a building, be watchful for signs of heat or smoke because they may be signs of smoldering remains of fire.
4. Have an electrician check your household wiring before the current is turned back on. Do not attempt to reconnect any utilities yourself.
5. Beware of structural damage. Roofs and floors may be weakened and need repair.
6. Discard food, beverages and medicines that have been exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
7. If you have a safe or strong box, do not try to open it. A safe or fire proof box can hold intense heat for several hours. If the door is opened before the box is cooled, the entering air combined with the high internal temperature may cause the contents to burst into flames.

Refer also to the General Family Preparedness section.

Information in this document was compiled by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center