

Safety in the Home

What are some of the common causes of house fires?

Most common causes of house fires are:

- Saucepan containing fat or oil boiling over onto the hot plate or burner;
- Heat setting on the stove being too high, causing burning or fat spattering;
- Leaving cooking on a stove unattended;
- Children playing with matches;
- Appliances such as: an iron, stove, oven or heater left on at night, or when the house is left unattended;
- Furnishings, toys or clothes placed too close to heaters where they may accidentally catch fire;
- Smoking in bed;
- An open fireplace left burning without a screen guard;
- Faulty electrical appliances;
- Incorrectly installed flues on wood heaters or stoves;
- Overloaded power points.

75% of house fires start with something smouldering.



How do people die in house fires?

People die in house fires by being exposed to radiant heat of flames, super heated air, poisonous gases (carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide) and smoke inhalation, which stops people from breathing. These gases can also restrict their vision, alter their judgement and cause unconsciousness.

How can a smoke alarm protect me in a fire?

Smoke alarms warn people of house fires. A sharp beeping sound, triggered by the presence of smoke in the house provides an early fire warning. When you hear this sound you should leave your house quickly.

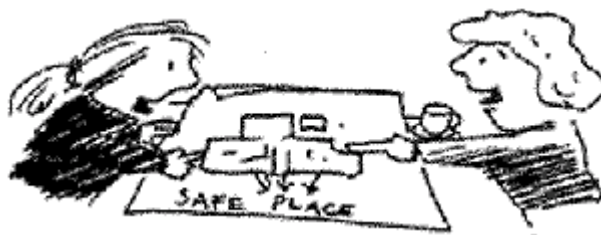
Since many house fires start during the night and smoke rises to the ceiling first, it is important to install smoke alarms on the ceiling or high on a wall in or near bedrooms, so the alarm awakens you during your sleep before the smoke and flames spread to your room.

What plans can I make to protect myself in a house fire?

It is extremely important that you develop a fire escape plan with your family to provide all family members with two safe ways out of the house in the case of a fire. To design a home escape plan you need to:

- Draw a floor plan of your home
- Plan 2 ways out of each bedroom, through the bedroom door or windows
- Make sure that windows can be easily opened
- Install smoke alarms near or in each bedroom
- If you sleep in an upstairs bedroom, it is wise to have an escape ladder kept under your bed. Make sure you know how to properly attach the ladder over the edge of the window to help you climb down safely.
- Try to provide a barrier from the smoke and flames
- Select a meeting place for all family members outside the home - the letter box, a specified tree, telephone pole or neighbour's house
- Practise your escape plan
- Keep the phone number of your local fire brigade near your phone
- Keep a key in deadlocks while you are in the home

Dial 000 in an emergency to contact the Fire Brigade, Police and Ambulance.



In a house fire remember how to escape:

- Don't waste time getting dressed, leave in the clothes you are wearing
- Crawl low in smoke, the cleanest air is nearest the floor
- Feel your bedroom door with the back of your hand before opening it and leave if safe to do so, closing the door as you leave. If hot to touch or smoke is coming under the door, then make your way out through the window. If you sleep in an upstairs bedroom, it is wise to have an escape ladder kept under your bed. Make

sure you know how to properly attach the ladder over the edge of the window to help you climb down safely.

- Make sure all family members are safe
- Once out, stay out - do not go back inside the house to get things, people or pets

Remember if your clothes catch fire, roll on the ground and smother the flames.

STOP where you are, as running fans the flames.

DROP to the ground, as flames travel upwards towards the face and hair.

ROLL on the ground with hands covering the face. This protects you from flames and heat by smothering the flames and prevents gases from damaging your eyes and lungs.



Note: This Fact Sheet was updated on 1 July 2005. Please replace any previous versions you have access to.