

Three Simple Steps To A Safer Home

Pop Quiz: Are you at greater risk from fire in;

- a) A high-rise hotel
- b) A house
- c) An elementary school

If you answered (a), you're mistaken. High-rise hotels are among the safest structures when it comes to fires because they typically have advanced built-in fire protection features such as smoke detectors and fire sprinklers in every room. If you answered (c), we got you again. Only about one percent of U.S. structure fires occur in educational properties.

The answer is (b). You are at greatest risk from fire in your own home. In fact, eight out of 10 fire deaths in the United States take place where most of us feel safest ? our home. Although that's alarming, according to the nonprofit National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), you need not fall victim to fire.

"There are three simple steps that everyone can take to make their home safer," says Meri-Kappy, NFPA's vice president for public education. "The steps are easy, but the trick is to convince people that fire isn't someone else's problem; it could actually happen to them."

According to NFPA, every household should have working smoke alarms on each level of the home, and outside each sleeping area. Test alarms at least once a month and replace batteries at least once a year. Replace smoke alarms that are 10 years old or older. Develop and physically practice a home fire drill with all occupants at least twice a year. Identify two ways out of each room and choose a meeting place outside where you will wait for the fire department. And regularly conduct a hunt for home safety hazards. Search for dangers such as fireplaces without screens, unattended candles, or overflowing ashtrays, and correct the hazards immediately.

FIRE SAFETY

Fall and winter are the most dangerous time of year for home fire safety. Home fires and fire death rates peak during this time of year because of increased use of alternative heating systems such as space heaters and fireplaces. According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), heating equipment has resulted in 49,200 home fires, 388 deaths, 1,445 injuries and \$515 million in property damage.

Additionally, increased use of electrical power to support holiday lights and improperly caring for live Christmas trees also contributes to higher fire and fire death rates. The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) estimates that fires during the holiday season injure 2,000 people and cause more than \$500 million in damage.

As residents begin to winterize their homes this fall, it is vitally important that they consider placing fire extinguishers on every level of the home and examining those already in place to assure quality performance. Furthermore, the NFPA states that residential fire extinguishers should be replaced every 12 years as well.

Residential fire extinguishers can be an important resource in a fire response plan because they provide homeowners with a means of containing fires before they get out of control, said Roy Marshall, Executive Director of The Residential Fire Safety Institute. Current household penetration for fire extinguishers is 76 percent, however, it is crucial to get penetration closer to 100 percent as with smoke detectors.

About 30 percent of home fires start in the kitchen-more than any other place in the home-and more than 50 percent of home fire deaths occur in sleeping areas, according to NFPA. To help reduce the risk of personal injury and to control property damage, fire extinguishers should be placed in kitchens, bedrooms and in other areas such as hallways and garages for quick access.

Fire extinguishers should be inspected regularly to ensure that they are properly charged and available when needed. Those that have low pressure, are damaged or corroded, or haven't been used within 12 years should be replaced with a multipurpose fire extinguisher.

There are three fire extinguisher ratings-A, B and C-and each has an intended use. Extinguishers with an A rating work against fires involving combustible materials such as wood, cloth or paper; a B rating indicates effectiveness against fires caused by flammable liquids such as grease; and C is intended for use in electrical fires. Because time is of the essence when battling a home fire, it may be safer to install fire extinguishers with an A-B-C rating throughout your home to be sure of your extinguisher's ability to put out or contain a fire. The Kidde Full Home Fire Extinguisher has an A-B-C rating and is available at hardware and home centers nationwide and costs about \$10.

In addition to proper fire extinguisher placement, families can stay safe when the cold weather arrives by:

- Making sure that heating equipment is inspected and cleaned by a professional;

- Keeping space and kerosene heaters at least three feet away from anything that can burn. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, 300 people die each year in fires started by heaters;

- Using the oven and range for food preparation only and not as a heating source for the home;

Refilling the stand of a live Christmas tree with water often. Also inspecting holiday lights before putting them up is recommended; and

Developing a fire escape plan that the entire family is familiar with. Fire extinguishers are one element of a fire response plan but the primary element is a safe escape.

To help reduce the risk of fire damage, extinguishers should be placed in kitchens, bedrooms and other areas for quick and convenient access.