Help the Aged

Fire

A Help the Aged advice leaflet

In association with RoSPA

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
House fires are often caused by a single moment of carelessness - a chip pan left unattended or a heater placed too close to the bed clothes. It is important for us all to be aware of possible fire hazards around the home and to take sensible precautions to protect ourselves and our homes.

**In the kitchen**

Many house fires start in the kitchen. Here are some ways you can help to reduce the chance of a fire breaking out when you're cooking.

- Never leave food cooking on the stove or under the grill unattended. Be especially careful not to leave a chip pan or frying pan unattended as fat can catch fire very quickly if it gets too hot. If you are called away from the kitchen, turn the cooker off until you get back.

- Before frying food, dry it off with kitchen paper or a clean tea towel to prevent the hot fat splashing when you put it in the pan.

- If you use a chip pan or deep fat fryer, don’t overfill it. As a rule, never fill the pan more than one third full of fat.

- If your chip pan or frying pan does catch fire, try to stay calm. **Do not tackle the fire if you don’t think that you’ll be able to do so safely.** If you do tackle it, turn off the heat and smother the flames with a damp cloth or fire blanket. Leave it to cool for at least half an hour. **Never pour water onto the pan and never try to move the pan while it is hot.** Always call the fire brigade, even if the fire appears to be out.

- After you have finished cooking, unplug all appliances which are not being used and check that all the rings and burners on your cooker have been turned off.
Smoking

If you smoke, the following basic precautions will reduce the risk of a fire starting.

- Don’t smoke if you are feeling tired.
- Never tap hot ash into a waste paper basket. Instead, always use a deep ash tray, placed where it cannot be knocked over.
- When sitting down, place your cigarette or pipe in the ash tray between puffs to prevent hot ash dropping on to your clothes or chair. This is particularly important in case you fall asleep in your chair while you’re smoking.
- When you have finished your cigarette, make sure you stub it out properly; never leave it burning in the ash tray.
- At the end of the day, wet the ash and cigarette butts under a tap and throw them away into a safe container.
- If you enjoy a late night smoke, have a cigarette before you get into bed as smoking in bed is extremely dangerous.

Heaters

The careless use of heaters can cause fires. Here are some suggestions to help you heat your home safely.

- Always place heaters away from bed clothes, curtains, furniture and main walk ways, in a position where they cannot easily be knocked over.
- Take extra care when using paraffin heaters. Fill them out of doors and never try to fill or move them once they are alight.
- Use a fire guard in front of an open fire. This will prevent you falling onto it if you trip or lose your balance and stop sparks or embers from the fire landing on the carpet.
Never dry washing close to a heater or on a fireguard in front of a fire.

- Sweep chimneys and flues in regular use at least once a year.

- Be careful not to sit too close to a fire or heater as your clothes could catch fire.

**Electrical appliances**

Electrical appliances can become a fire hazard if they develop a fault or are misused. Here are some ways of keeping appliances safe.

- All electrical appliances need to be checked regularly by an electrician. Look for membership of the **National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contractors (NICEIC)** or the **Electrical Contractors’ Association (ECA)**.

- Watch out for warning signs. If a piece of electrical equipment cuts out continually, gives off a strange smell or if the plug feels warm, switch it off immediately and get it checked.

- Never overload power points. Where there are not enough sockets use a fused trailing adapter. For appliances which use a lot of power, such as heaters, hair dryers and kettles, use only one plug per socket.

- If you use an electric blanket, make sure you read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions carefully. As a general rule, you should always switch off the electric blanket before you get into bed. When you are not using your electric blanket, store it without creasing and have it serviced at least every three years. If it is more than ten years old, it is advisable to replace it with a new one.
Candles and night-lights

Follow these rules and any manufacturer’s guidance to stay safe when using candles and night-lights (sometimes called tea-lights).

- Never leave lit candles unattended or burn them while you are asleep.
- Always use a proper holder. Don’t stick a candle to a saucer with hot wax.
- Keep candles away from draughts and flammable materials.
- Night-lights must always be placed in a heat proof container as the base becomes hot enough to cause fires.

Before you go to bed

By carrying out the following checks before you go to bed, you can greatly reduce the chance of a fire starting while you are asleep.

- Make sure all the burners or rings on your cooker are off.
- Check all heaters are off and place guards in front of open fires.
- Switch off all unused electrical appliances at the socket and, if possible, unplug them for extra safety.
- Close all your internal doors, particularly on unoccupied rooms such as the kitchen, front room and dining room.
- Unplug your electric blanket if it is the type that should not be left on overnight. This will include most under blankets.
- Extinguish any candles that are burning.
- Wet your ash and cigarette butts and throw away in a safe container.
- **Remember, never smoke in bed!**
Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms can give you valuable extra time to escape from a fire and may even save your life. Only buy smoke alarms which are marked with the British Standard Number BS 5446. Install them where they can detect smoke from any part of your home and be heard clearly. Try to avoid fitting them in the kitchen and bathroom as the steam or cooking fumes could trigger a false alarm.

Smoke alarms need to be tested every month and the battery changed at least once a year. To help you remember, always replace it on a date that means something to you, such as a birthday. Some smoke alarms give out a warning signal to indicate when the battery is running low, but don't rely on this as you could miss it! Never take the battery out unless you are replacing it with a new one. If you are worried about forgetting to change the battery, you could buy a smoke alarm fitted with special batteries that don't need replacing for ten years.

Further information

For more information on fire prevention, you can contact your local fire brigade. Their address and telephone number will be in your local telephone directory.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) can also give you advice on specific fire safety problems. Write to Information Services, RoSPA, Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Birmingham B5 7ST.
What to do if there is a fire in your home

- Raise the alarm.
- Close the door on the fire.
- Get out of the house.
- Call the fire brigade by dialling 999 from a neighbour’s house.
- Make sure the fire brigade get your correct address; ask them to read it back to you to be certain.
- Wait outside until they arrive. Don’t try to re-enter your home.

If you are unable to get out of your house

- Go to a room away from the fire, ideally one facing the street.
- Close the door behind you.
- Block the foot of the door with any available materials.
- Open the window and attract attention.
- Get somebody to call the fire brigade and await their arrival.

In the event of fire dial 999

If you live in a block of flats or other multi-occupied dwelling, make a note here of your fire escape route:

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Help the Aged

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Cut this page out and pin it up where you could see it if there was a fire