

Help keep your family safe

Check for fire hazards at home

In this age of heightened security awareness, we've become more aware than ever of the importance of feeling safe and secure. But the same homes that offer us a sense of security are not free from fire risk. Thousands of people die in home fires every year, and billions of dollars in property is lost.

It doesn't have to be that way. The National Fire Protection Association reminds us that by teaming up for fire safety, we can educate each other and our children about how to prevent and respond in the event of a home fire.

Every fire safety team starts with firefighters — but they can't do it alone. The NFPA urges us to adopt this simple idea: team up with the people with whom you live, work, play and worship so that all of you will be better prepared to prevent and, if necessary, survive a home fire.

The theme for this year's fire prevention program is "Get Out! Stay Out!" Develop a fire escape plan for your home and practice it at least twice a year. Identify a meeting place outside where everyone can gather once you've escaped.

Throughout October, Hanford Fire Department firefighters are available to share fire safety information with Hanford employees. Work groups looking for safety meeting topics in October may contact Martha Rice at 373-3955 to schedule presentations on fire safety or arrange to pick up fire safety materials.

When you take time to do a fire safety inspection, you'll reduce your family's risk of being harmed in a home fire. Here are a few tips to help you create a fire-safe home:

- Never leave cooking food on the stovetop unattended, and keep a close eye on food cooking inside the oven.
- Create a "kid-free zone" around the stove, keeping children and pets at least 3 feet away from the cooking area.
- Keep cooking areas clean and clear of materials that could catch fire, such as pot-holders, towels, rags, drapes and food packaging.



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- Give space heaters plenty of space. Space heaters should be at least 3 feet away from anything that could burn. Always make sure to turn heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Have solid-fueled heating equipment, including chimneys, chimney connectors, fireplaces and wood or coal stoves inspected by a professional every year and cleaned as often as necessary. This also applies to all other types of fueled heating equipment, including central furnaces and space heaters.
- Lit candles should be monitored constantly by an adult and extinguished when adults leave the room or go to sleep.
- Use candleholders that won't tip over easily, are made of non-combustible materials, and are big enough to catch dripping wax safely.
- Never leave children alone with burning candles. NFPA recommends against allowing children to have candles in their bedrooms.
- If there are smokers in your home, make sure ashtrays are large and deep and won't tip over. Douse cigarette and cigar butts with water before discarding them.
- Keep matches and lighters up high and out of children's sight and reach— preferably in a locked cabinet.
- Replace or repair any electrical device with a loose, frayed or broken cord.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for plugging an appliance into a receptacle outlet (most receptacle outlets contain two receptacles). As an added precaution, avoid plugging more than one high-wattage appliance into a single receptacle.
- Put plastic safety covers on receptacle outlets in homes with small children
- Install ground-fault circuit-interrupters to reduce the risk of electrical shock. GFCIs shut off faulty electrical circuits and equipment more quickly than conventional fuses or circuit breakers. The devices are inexpensive and can be hard-wired into your home's electrical system by a professional electrician.
- Install arc-fault circuit-interrupters to protect against unwanted electrical arcing, which often occurs in damaged wires or cords and can generate high temperatures and cause a fire. AFCIs protect against fire by continuously monitoring the electrical current in a circuit and will shut off a circuit when an unwanted arcing fault is detected. (The National Electrical Code® requires AFCIs in bedrooms of new residential construction.) The devices can be installed in your home's electrical system by a professional electrician.

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- Store highly flammable liquids like gasoline, kerosene and propane outside the home in a properly ventilated shed or garage. Store them only in small quantities and in their original containers or in safety containers. Never bring even a small amount of gasoline indoors. The vapors are highly flammable and can be ignited by a tiny spark.
- Every home should have smoke detectors installed on every floor and outside every sleeping area (inside as well if you sleep with the doors closed). Be sure to test your detectors frequently. In a dark or smoke-filled room, the sound of a smoke alarm can be disorienting. Make sure your family recognizes the sound of your smoke detector alarms.

If a fire should start in or around your home, an appropriate portable fire extinguisher in the hands of a well-trained adult, can save lives and minimize property damage by putting out a small fire. But never forget that fire spreads rapidly. Your first priority should always be to get your family out of the house, make sure they're safe and call 911 immediately. ■