

Family Fire Safety: It's Always in Season

Underwriters Laboratories (UL) uses Fire Prevention Week to share safety tips with families

Flames can completely engulf a home in less than five minutes, and each year there are more than half a million home fires in the United States. Fire is one of the most dangerous situations for families, but fortunately, this risk can be cut by following a few simple safety tips.

Underwriters Laboratories (UL), one of the world's premier safety testing organizations, explains how to reduce the chance of fire in your home as well as how to react in case a fire breaks out.

CHECK YOUR SMOKE ALARMS

What is the easiest way to save a life? Installing a smoke alarm--all you need are two screws, one screwdriver and a battery. In fact, since smoke alarms were introduced, fire deaths have been cut in half.

UL recommends installing both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms in your home, or consider dual-technology smoke alarms, to optimize detection and permit you and your family the best available escape time. Place a smoke alarm on EACH level of your home, outside EACH sleeping area and in EACH bedroom.

- An additional technology option for consumers to consider for optimal detection in homes is interconnected smoke alarms. These alarms can be connected to each other by wires or by using wireless technology. If one alarm is triggered, all interconnected alarms in your home will sound, possibly alerting you to a fire earlier.
- Whichever type of alarm you choose, make sure it is UL listed. This means representative samples of the alarm have met UL's stringent safety standards.
- Test your alarms once a month to make sure they work.
- Put new batteries in your alarms once a year.

PLAN AN ESCAPE ROUTE

Developing and practicing a home fire escape plan can mean the difference between life and death. Here are some tips that UL recommends for families as they develop their home fire escape plans:

- Each member of the family should know how to get safely outside by at least two routes.

- Hold a random fire drill in your apartment, condominium or house and require every family member to practice opening the doors and windows necessary to escape.
- Draw a simple floor plan of your home. On it, mark:
 - two exits from every room, including windows
 - an outside family assembly point, such as driveway or parking lot
- Post the escape plan in a central location, such as the refrigerator door, and encourage family members to memorize it.
- Have a Parental Plan B because children, older people and those with special needs may not wake up to the sound of a smoke alarm. Consider how to aid their escape when developing the overall escape plan.
- Make sure escape routes are clear of obstacles, such as couches and tables, and family members can easily open the doors and windows, including any security bars.
- In apartments and condos, count the number of doors between yours and the exit. In the dark or in smoke, you'll be able to find the exit by running your finger along the wall to count doors when you are evacuating.
- Practice your escape plan at least twice a year with all household members.

KEEP YOUR KITCHEN SAFE

Whether stirring up a quick dinner or creating a masterpiece four-course meal, here's a simple recipe for safer cooking:

- Keep an eye on your cooking and stay in the kitchen. Unattended cooking is the #1 cause of home fires.
- Wear short or close-fitting clothing. Loose clothing can dangle near stove burners and catch fire.
- Watch children closely when cooking, and teach them safe cooking practices.
- Clean cooking surfaces to prevent food and grease build-up.
- Keep curtains, towels and pot holders away from hot surfaces, and store solvents and flammable cleaners away from heat sources. Never keep gasoline in the house.
- Turn pan handles inward to prevent food spills.

CANDLE SAFETY

After declining for decades, candle-related home fires started increasing in 1991, along with candle sales currently at more than \$2 billion annually. Since 1995, each year has seen a record-high number of fires blamed on candles. Fire officials attribute the rise in part to the increasing popularity of decorative candles and aromatherapy.

- Never leave a burning candle unattended. Extinguish candles and make sure they are completely out and the wick embers are no longer glowing before leaving the room or going to sleep.

- Keep candles away from decorations, curtains, bedding, paper, walls, furniture and other combustible materials.
- Place candles out of the reach of children and pets and away from areas where they can be knocked over.
- Use sturdy, non-combustible candleholders that collect dripping wax and won't tip over.
- Extinguish a candle when 2 inches of wax remains or a half-inch if the candle is in a container. This prevents heat damage to the surface and stops glass containers from breaking.
- Never leave children unattended in a room with lit candles.
- Always keep candles — as well as matches and lighters — out of the reach of children.
- Avoid carrying a candle during a power outage. Use a flashlight.
- Never touch or move a burning candle when the wax is liquefied.

HOME HEATING: THE SAFE WAY

With heating costs rising each winter, the prospect of using alternative heating sources — woodstoves, space heaters and fireplaces — is more tempting than ever. However these alternative heating sources do carry some additional safety risks.

- Fireplace and chimney fires are mostly caused by a buildup of flammable creosote, the product of wood smoke and moisture. To prevent this, wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys and chimney connectors should be inspected annually by a professional and cleaned as often as inspections suggest.
- Use space heaters only as a supplementary source of heat. These devices are not intended to replace the home's heating system. Keep all space heaters at least 3 feet away from household combustibles and look for the UL Mark on your heaters.
- Install UL-Listed carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in the home to warn about faulty furnace, fireplace and oven flues or any other venting problems.
- Before you buy a kerosene heater, check with your local fire department to make sure that it is legal to use in your community.
- Cooking stoves, gas ovens and grills should never be used for heating a room or home.

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About UL

Underwriters Laboratories (UL) is an independent product safety certification organization that has been testing products and writing Standards for Safety for over a century. UL evaluates more than 19,000 types of products, components, materials and systems annually with 21 billion UL Marks appearing on 71,000 manufacturers' products each year. UL's worldwide family of companies and network of service providers includes 63 laboratory, testing and certification facilities serving customers in 99 countries. For more information, visit: www.UL.com/newsroom.