Fire Safety & Burn Prevention for Older Adults

Illinois Fire Safety Alliance
OLDER ADULTS ARE AT RISK – ARE YOU ONE OF THEM?

• Over 1,200 Americans 65 years of age and older die as a result of a fire each year.

• Approximately 3,000 older adults are injured from residential fires each year.

• Fires and burns are a leading cause of death from unintentional injuries in older adults.

• Cooking fires are the leading cause of injuries in older adults.

• Careless use of smoking materials are the leading cause of fire related deaths in older adults.

• Approximately one-fifth of individuals aged 65 or older who die in fire are bed ridden or challenged by some disability and two-thirds are in the room where the fire started.

• The three leading causes of fire: cooking, smoking, and heating, injure or kill their victims by igniting their clothes, bedding, or furnishings.

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The Illinois Fire Safety Alliance is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to fire safety, burn prevention, and supporting burn survivors.
It’s a known fact that older adults aged 65 and over, die in home fires far more often than the rest of the population.

You can retire fire by taking care of yourself and influencing others, such as your neighbors, friends and family, about fire safety.

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FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION,
GRADUATE TO A SAFER LIFE
• With proper education many of the fire and burn related deaths or injuries can be eliminated.

• It has been estimated that over 80% of the burn injuries treated at burn centers were due in part by carelessness.

• Nearly 30% of the older adult fire victims were directly involved with the ignition of the fire that caused their own death.

• There are many organizations, such as, the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance (www.ifsa.org) that have taken on the challenge to reduce the number of fire and burn related deaths and injuries through education.

• Contact your local Fire Department for information about their Public Safety Education Programs available to you.
IF YOU HAVE TO SMOKE, PLEASE BE CAREFUL

Properly extinguish all smoking materials.
• Careless use of smoking materials is the leading cause of fire related deaths in older adults.

• If you can, designate a smoking area outside of your home.

• If you do smoke in your home, provide large deep ashtrays that will not easily tip.

• Make sure that all smoking materials are properly extinguished by dousing them with water before throwing them into a trash can.

• If you or anyone has been smoking in your home, check between, in, and around the furniture for smoldering cigarette butts before going to bed or leaving your home.

• Make it a rule that smoking in bed is not permitted.

• If oxygen is used in your home, never smoke anywhere near the use or storage of an oxygen tank.
MAKE SURE THAT YOUR FAVORITE RECIPES INCLUDE FIRE SAFETY

Ingredients:
• Watchful eyes
• Pot holders/oven mitts
• Short or tight fitting sleeves
• Clean area around the stove, free of anything that can burn
• Proper lids for pots/pans being used
• Kitchen fires are the leading cause of fire related injuries in older adults.

• Dress properly while cooking; wear short or tight sleeves. Long and loose sleeves are more likely to catch on fire or get caught on a pot handle when reaching over the stove.

• Make sure that you are properly equipped. You should have pot holders or oven mitts readily available so that you can handle hot pots and pans safely. The proper lid for the pan you are using should be available to smother any fire that may have accidentally started. Your home should be equipped with a portable fire extinguisher rated for the kitchen. (BC- Type Extinguisher.)

• Never leave cooking unattended. If you have to leave the room, set a timer or take something with you, like a pot holder or a spoon that will remind you that you left something cooking on the stove.

• Never cook if you are tired or drowsy from taking medication or impaired from alcohol.

• When you are finished cooking, make sure that the oven and stove have been properly turned off.
STAY WARM, BUT SAFE,
DURING COLDER TIMES OF THE YEAR
• Heating equipment is one of the three leading causes of fire related deaths and injuries to older adults.

• Furnaces and boilers should be cleaned and serviced by professionals on a yearly basis.

• When using space heaters, use the following guidelines:
  ✓ When purchasing an electric space heater, look for heaters that have automatic shut-offs.
  ✓ Only purchase equipment that has been listed by an approved testing agency, such as, Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
  ✓ Give space heaters space. Space heaters should have a minimum of three feet of clearance all around them, including you. If you do not have a yard stick, a cane is approximately three feet long.
  ✓ Never use an extension cord with a space heater.
  ✓ Keep young children and pets away from the space heaters.
  ✓ Turn off or unplug the space heater if you are leaving the room or before going to bed.
A WORKING SMOKE ALARM AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE
• Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of your home and within fifteen feet of all sleeping areas. Consider installing a smoke alarm in every bedroom.

• If you are hearing impaired, install smoke alarms that have strobes or flashing lights. These smoke alarms feature a high-density light that can wake a sleeping person.

• If your smoke alarm is chirping, this is an indication that the battery is low. Replace the batteries twice a year and test your alarms every month. Ask for assistance from a relative, neighbor, a local organization, or the Fire Department.

• The majority of smoke alarms have a life expectancy of 10 years. If your smoke alarms are older than 10 years, they should be replaced.

• There are two types of smoke alarms, Photoelectric-type and Ionization-type.
  ✓ Photoelectric smoke alarms are most reliable in the detection of smoldering fires.
  ✓ Ionization smoke alarms are more reliable in the free burning stage of fire, minimal smoke.

They now have a smoke alarm that has both types of technology. Consider replacing old smoke alarms with the dual detection type smoke alarms. Make sure that the smoke alarm that you purchase has been tested by an approved testing agency, such as, Underwriters Laboratory (UL).

• In addition, carbon monoxide (CO) detectors should be installed by the sleeping areas of your home. Purchase only CO detectors that have been listed by an approved testing agency.

• Carbon monoxide (CO) detectors must be tested monthly.

• Keep your smoke alarms and CO detectors dust free and clean.
BE PREPARED – PLAN YOUR ESCAPE
• If you live in a multi-story home, consider having the bedroom on the first floor.
• If you live in an apartment type building, know where the exits and exit stairwells are located.
• Know at least two ways out of every room.
• Make sure that all hallways, stairways, and exit doors are free from clutter.
• Repair any doors, windows, or locks that do not open easily; and practice opening them often.
• Keep your eyeglasses, hearing aids, and telephone/cell phone next to your bed.
• Nightlights can help light up your way out.
• Once you are outside, go to a safe place, such as a neighbor's, to call for help.
• Know the emergency numbers, such as 911, for your area.
• If you or someone in your home or apartment has a disability, plan for it. Keep canes, walkers, wheelchairs readily available. Know where the safe areas of refuge are located in your building. Make sure that the Fire Department is notified if you are trapped or need assistance getting out of your home or unit.
DONT BE SHOCKED BY ELECTRICITY!

Look for these safety hazards-
• Frayed cord
• Overloaded circuit
• Cord under rug
• Electricity is the fourth leading cause of fire related deaths and injuries to older adults.

• Every year more than 50,000 home fires are started by electrical problems.

• If the power goes out often in your home or your lights flicker, make noise, or smell bad, have a licensed electrician inspect your electrical wiring.

• Outlets in the bathrooms or by a water source should have a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI).

• To prevent overloading, never plug more than two appliances into an outlet.

• Extension cords are for temporary use only.

• Protect all cords from damage. Do not run cords under rugs or through doorways.

• When purchasing electrical appliances, make sure that the equipment has been listed by an approved testing agency, such as, Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

• If an appliance has a damaged or frayed cord, do not use it. Replace it.

• Use light bulbs with the appropriate wattage for the size fixture. A bulb with too many watts may overheat and cause a fire.
IN CASE OF FIRE...
GET OUT AND STAY OUT!
• Do not try to put the fire out yourself.

• Your efforts should be placed on getting out safely, warning others, and when you have reached a safe area call for emergency help. Do not hesitate to call for emergency help. Please understand that your safety comes first. You are not bothering the Fire Department by calling them.

• Do not try and gather personal possessions.

• If you are able, close the door as you exit.

• If you are in a smoke filled area, get down as low as you can and move as quickly as you can out of the home or building.

• If you are trapped or can not exit your building for any reason, close all the doors between you and the fire and call the Fire Department, 911 or your local emergency services number (____)____________. Tell them your situation and where you are located.

• If in a multi-story building when a fire occurs, use the stairs. Do not use the elevator.

• Never go back inside for any reason.

• If you or your family has an escape plan, follow it by going to your meeting place so that other family members will know that you are all right.

• If any of your clothes catch on fire, Stop, Drop, and Roll. If you cannot Stop, Drop, and Roll, you can use a large towel or blanket to smother the flames.
CARE FOR YOUR BURNS AND SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION.
• Burns can be caused by direct contact with flame, hot liquids/grease, or hot surfaces.

• Many burns may be more severe than they first appear and require immediate medical attention.

• Remove the clothing from the burned area.

• Stop the burning by running cool water over the affected area for a few minutes.

• Keep the area clean; cover the burn with a sterile pad or a clean dry cloth.

• Never apply ointment, grease or butter to the affected areas.

• Seek medical attention quickly to prevent inflammation and possible infections.
MAKE SURE THAT A FIRE IS NOT JUST A FLICKER AWAY!
• Make sure that a candle is completely extinguished if you are leaving the room or before going to bed. Burning candles should never be left in a room unattended.

• If you use candles, make sure that they are placed in sturdy candle holders and located so that they can not be knocked over.

• Make sure that candles are kept away from combustible items, such as, curtains, papers, and other like materials.

• Make sure that candles are out of reach from children and pets.

• Keep matches and lighters away from children by putting them away after lighting your candles.

• Consider using battery operated candles.

• During a power outage use a flashlight or other battery operated lighting instead of candles.
FIRE SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR OLDER ADULTS

Use this checklist as a guide to identify possible fire safety concerns in your home. If you check NO for any question, take the appropriate actions to correct the concerns. This can reduce the risk of fire in your home.

YES  NO
☐  ☐ Do you have a working smoke alarm on every level of your home?
☐  ☐ Do you have a working carbon monoxide (CO) detector?
☐  ☐ Do you test your smoke alarms and CO detector monthly?
☐  ☐ Are the emergency numbers posted clearly by your phone?
☐  ☐ Do you maintain 3 feet of clearance around your space heater(s)?
☐  ☐ Is the space heater plugged directly into an outlet, not an extension cord?
☐  ☐ Are appliances in your home listed by an approved agency, such as, (UL)?
☐  ☐ Are all the electrical cords in good shape, not frayed or cracked?
☐  ☐ Are the electrical cords in the open, not under rugs or through doorways?
☐  ☐ If someone smokes, do you have large deep ashtrays for them to use?
☐  ☐ Is your kitchen properly equipped with pot holders, oven mitts, lids and a fire extinguisher?
☐  ☐ Is the area around the stove free from combustible materials?
☐  ☐ If you live in an apartment, do you know where all the exits are?
☐  ☐ Are all the exit and emergency lights working?
☐  ☐ Do all doors, windows, and locks open properly?
☐  ☐ Are the hallways, stairways, and doors kept clear for exiting?
☐  ☐ If the doors have self closing devices, are they operating properly?
☐  ☐ Do you have a flashlight, with good batteries, available?
☐  ☐ DO YOU HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN?