



Fire safety in the home – A quick guide

Follow these simple, inexpensive tips to prevent fires in your home.

Fire alarms

Fit a smoke alarm and test it regularly

- Fit smoke alarms on each level of your home – it's the simplest, single step you can take to cut the risk of dying from a fire in your home.
- Test the batteries in your smoke alarm every week and change them every year - never remove them.

How many fire alarms do you need?

The more alarms you have, the safer you'll be. At minimum you should have one on each floor. However, if you have only one alarm and two floors, put it somewhere you'll be able to hear it when you're asleep.

If you have a TV or other large electrical appliance (such as a computer) in any of the bedrooms, you should fit a smoke alarm there too.

When choosing a fire alarm?

There are 2 types of fire alarms.

Ionisation alarms:

These are the cheapest and most readily available and are very sensitive to flaming fires (ones that burn fiercely such as chip-pan fires). Ionisation alarms will detect flaming fires before the smoke gets too thick.

Optical alarms

These are more expensive and more effective at detecting slow-burning fires (such as smouldering foam-filled furniture or overheated wiring). Optical alarms are less likely to go off accidentally and so are best for ground-floor hallways and for homes on one level.

For the best protection, you should install one of each. However, if you can't have both, it's still safer to have either one, rather than none at all.



British standard
kitemark

Whichever model you choose, you should make sure that it meets British Standard 5446, Part 1 (BS 5446-1) and ideally also carries the British Standard Kitemark.

Installing your fire alarm:

Installing a smoke alarm only takes a few minutes - just follow the manufacturer's instructions that come with it. The best place is on the ceiling, near or at the middle of the room or hall. The alarm should be at least 30cm (one foot) away from a wall or light.

If it's difficult for you to fit yourself, ask a family member or friend to help you, or contact your local fire service.

Maintaining your fire alarm

To keep your smoke alarm in good working order, you should:

- Test it once a week , by pressing the test button until the alarm sounds
- Change the battery once a year (unless it's a ten year alarm).
- Replace the whole unit every ten years.

Cooking

Take care when cooking:

More than half of accidental fires at home are started by cooking. Many kitchen fires happen when people are not paying attention or they leave things unattended.

Take extra care when cooking with hot oil and don't leave children alone in the kitchen when the hob or oven is on.

How to cook safety?

There are several things you can do to prevent fires in the kitchen. Make sure you don't get distracted when you are cooking, and:

- Take pans off the heat or turn the heat down if you're called away from the cooker, eg by a phone call.
- Take care if you're wearing loose clothing as it can catch fire easily.
- Don't cook if you have been drinking alcohol or taken prescription drugs- you may get drowsy or lose concentration.

Cooker and toaster safety

You can prevent fires when using as cooker or a toaster by following these simple tips:

- Turn saucepans so the handles don't stick out over the edge of the hob or over another ring.
- Double check that the cooker is off when you have finished cooking

- Make sure tea-towels aren't hanging over the cooker and don't put oven gloves on top of a hot cooker.
- Keep the oven, hob and grill clean – built up fat and bits of food can start a fire.
- Check that the toaster is clean and well away from curtains and empty the crumb tray regularly.

Cooking with oil

You need to be especially careful when you are deep-fat frying or cooking with oil because hot oil can catch fire easily. Make sure you:

- Don't fill a chip pan or other deep-fat fryer more than one- third full of oil.
- Use a thermostat-controlled deep-fat fryer which will make sure that fat doesn't get too hot.

Dealing with a fire in your kitchen

If a pan catches fire in your kitchen:

- Don't move it because it will be very hot.
- Turn off the heat if it's safe to do so - don't lean over the pan to reach the controls.
- Don't use a fire extinguisher on a pan of oil because the force of the extinguisher can spread the fire.
- Never use water on chip pan fires as this will cause a fireball.
- Get out, stay out and call 999.

If an electrical appliance catches fire, don't throw water on it. If it is safe to do so, you may be able to put out the fire immediately by:

- Pulling the appliance's plug out.
- switching off the power at the fuse box

If the fire doesn't go out, get out of the house, stay out and call 999.

Fire safety equipment for the kitchen

You could consider keeping a fire blanket in the kitchen. Fire blankets can be used to put out a fire or wrap a person whose clothes are on fire.

Don't fit a smoke alarm in a kitchen or bathroom where it could be set off by cooking fumes or steam. If you find your smoke alarm goes off a lot accidentally, you can buy one that is fitted with a 'hush button. This means you can silence it instantly so you're not tempted to remove the battery (except to change it for a new one).

Ventilation in the kitchen

Check regularly that the ventilation in your kitchen, like range hoods or fans, is working properly and is not blocked up. This is especially important if you have a gas cooker in case any leaking gas builds up.

Planning an escape route and make a bedtime check.

Preparing and practising a plan of action will help you act quickly if there's a fire in your home – it could even save your life. Find out how to make an escape plan, including tips on making a bedtime fire safety check.

Make an escape route:

When you make an escape plan, involve everyone who lives in your home, including children, older or disabled people and any lodgers.

Choosing an escape route.

Here are some tips to help plan your escape from fire:

- The best escape route is the normal way in and out of your home.
- Think of any difficulties you may have getting out. For example at night you may need to have a torch to light your way.
- Choose a second escape route, in case the first one is blocked.
- Keep all exits clear of obstruction, like bicycles.
- If there are children, older or disabled people or pets, plan how you will get them out.

Think about a safe place to go if you can't escape

The first priority is to keep people safe by getting them out the building. If you can't escape, you'll need to find a room to take refuge in. This is especially important if you have difficulty moving around or going downstairs on your own.

Make sure everyone knows where door and windows keys are kept

Decide where the keys to doors and windows should be kept and always keep them there. Make sure everyone in your household knows where they are.

Explain the plan

Once you have made your plan, go through it with everyone in the household. You could also:

- Put a reminder of what to do in a fire somewhere where it will be seen regularly, like on the fridge door.
- Put your address by the phone so that children can read it out to the emergency services.

Practise the plan

Make sure you have walked through the plan with everyone in your household. Regularly remind everyone of what to do, and what not to do, in the event of a fire.

Do a bedtime check – Develop the habit

When you are asleep, it takes longer to notice the signs of a fire. If you don't have a working smoke alarm, there will be nothing to wake you.

To help prevent fires occurring through the night, it's important to check your home for fire hazards before you go to bed. Make sure you:

- Close inside doors at night to stop a fire from spreading.
- Check the cooker is turned off
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances (Unless they are meant to be left on, like your freezer).
- Put candles and cigarettes out properly
- Turn heaters off and put up fireguards
- Make sure exits are kept clear.

Keep your guests safe from fire

Your family or housemates may be familiar with your house or flat but you guests may not be. If you have guests staying overnight:

- Tell them where the keys are kept.
- Give them information about anything in the house they may not be familiar with for example how to unlock your front door.

It's particularly important to provide some fire safety information if you are hosting a party and people are drinking alcohol. Also, the risk of fire during celebrations may be higher from candles, cooking and cigarettes/

Escaping from a high-rise building

Living above the fire floor doesn't necessarily make you any more at risk from fire.

High- rise flats are built to be fire-proof – walls, ceilings and doors will hold back flames and smoke.

Most of your planning should be the same as homes at ground level, but there are some key differences:

- You won't be able to use the lift if there's a fire, so choose an escape route that takes this into account.
- Count how many doors there are on the route to get to the stairs when you can't use the lift, in case you can't find your way.
- Make sure stairways and fire escapes are kept clear of all obstructions and that fire doors are never locked.
- Regularly check that you can open the doors to stairways or escapes from both sides.

If there's a fire elsewhere in the building, you are usually safest in your own flat, unless heat or smoke is affecting you. If you are affected, you should get out, stay out and call 999.

Electrical appliance fire safety

Electrical appliances, plugs and cables that are old or poorly wired can be a real danger. Just because there's no flame, doesn't mean there's no fire risk. Find out what to check for to ensure your appliances don't put you or your family or housemates at risk from fire.

What to check for:

There are particular danger signs to look out for on all electrical items you have around your home. If you think something needs fixing or changing, do it straight away.

Plugs and sockets

For plugs and sockets, keep an eye out for the following:

- hot plugs or sockets, scorch marks, fuses that often blow, or flickering lights – they are all signs of loose wiring or other electrical problems
- badly wired plugs – any coloured wires sticking out could come loose and debris could also get into the plug
- Overloaded sockets – plugging too many electrical appliances into one socket can lead to overheating.

Cables and leads

The risks with cables and leads include:

- Getting frayed and damaged – make sure the outer covering of all power leads is in good condition and replace if necessary.
- Being badly positioned – they shouldn't be anywhere that they could be tripped over, or near water, cookers or other sources of heat.
- Running them under rugs or carpets where they can wear through without anyone noticing- position them elsewhere.

Appliances

For electrical appliances, you should never:

- Get them wet- this includes plugs and sockets, so don't put a vase of flowers on top of the TV, for example.
- Leave them on at night – Unless they are designed to be left on, like freezers.
- Put anything in the microwave that is made of metal, or has a metallic finish or parts.

Keep electrical items in good working order

Follow the guidelines below to make sure your electrical items are safe to use.

Maintenance

Electrical appliances, especially ones that run at high speeds and contain motors, like washing machines, should be serviced once a year by a qualified electrician.

Plugs, sockets and cables

Plugs, sockets and cables also need to be used correctly, you should:

- Make sure you can't see any coloured wires between the plug and the power lead – change the plug properly.
- Make sure the wires are held firmly in place inside the plug.
- Use sockets safely – it's better to use a bar adaptor (multi board) on a lead than a block adaptor.
- Only use one adaptor per socket – don't plug one adaptor into another and try to keep to one plug per socket.

Fuses

When you're fitting or replacing a fuse, it's important to use the right fuse for the appliance to make sure the fuse doesn't overheat. Check the manual or look for a sticker on the appliance to find out its wattage and then use the correct fuse:

- for appliances up to 700 watts, use a 3 amp fuse
- for appliances between 700 and 1,000 watts, use a 5 amp fuse
- for appliances more than 1,000 watts, use a 13 amp fuse

Extension leads and adaptors have a limit on how many amps they can take, so be careful not to overload them, to reduce the risk of a fire.

Dealing with an electrical fire:

If there is an electrical fire, pull the plug out, or switch off the power at the fuse box - if it is safe to do so. Sometimes this can stop the fire immediately. Never use water on an electrical fire, and don't take any risks with your safety – get out, stay out and call 999.

Smoking safety

More people die in fires caused by smoking than in fires caused by anything else. Tobacco is manufactured to stay alight, meaning it can remain smouldering and start a fire.

Safety tips if you smoke

Follow these safety tips to avoid causing a fire:

- Never smoke in bed - it's very easy to fall asleep and allow your cigarette to set light to your bedclothes or furnishings
- Don't smoke if you're drowsy - especially if you're sitting in a comfortable chair or if you've been drinking or taking prescription drugs; again, it's easy to fall asleep
- Don't leave a lit cigarette (or cigar or pipe) – they can easily overbalance and land on the carpet or other flammable material; and make sure your ashtray is heavy and can't tip easily
- Make totally sure that your butts (and any remains in your pipe bowl) aren't still smouldering when you've finished with them; wet them and empty your ashtray into a metal bin outside the house.
- keep lighters, matches and smoking materials out of the reach of children – you can also buy child-resistant lighters and containers for matches

Using candles, decorative lights and decorations safely

Candles, decorations and decorative lights are a growing cause of fires. By following these simple guidelines, you can reduce the risks that come with using them.

Using candles safely in your home

Keep the safety tips below in mind whenever you use candles at home.

Lighted candles – where to put them

Candles are best placed:

- On a heat-resistant surface – be especially careful with night lights and tea lights, which get hot enough to melt plastic.
- in a proper candle holder, so they don't fall over
- Out of the reach of children and pets
- Out of draughts and away from curtains, other fabrics or furniture, which could catch fire.
- With at least 1 metre (3 feet) between the candle and any surface above it.
- With at least 10 centimetres (4 inches) between any two candles.
- Away from clothes and hair - if there's any chance you could forget a candle is there and lean across it, put it somewhere else

Make sure you put out candles before moving them and don't let anything fall into the hot wax, like matchsticks.

Putting candles out

Never leave a candle unattended. Make sure you:

- Put out candles before you leave a room and before you go to bed
- Never leave a burning candle or oil burner in a child's bedroom
- Use a snuffer or a spoon to put them out – blowing them can send sparks and hot wax flying
- Double-check that they are completely out and not still smouldering

Candles and celebrations

Candles and night lights are often used in celebrations for Christmas, Diwali and other festivals. Make sure you don't put candles in, or by, a Christmas tree, plants, flowers or other foliage. You should also be careful that ribbons, greetings cards and other decorations aren't near any candle flames.

Decorative lights and decorations during celebrations

Fairy lights and Christmas tree lights don't get used very often, so you should make sure they are in good working order before using them:

- Check that the fuse in the plug is the right size – See the box for the maximum size of fuse you should use.
- Replace any bulbs that blow.
- Don't leave lights on when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Don't let the bulbs touch anything that can burn easily, like paper or fabrics and other Christmas tree decorations.

Make sure you also keep other festive decorations made of tissue paper or cardboard, and greeting cards away from heaters, lights, fireplaces and candles.

Ask for a home visit from the Fire and Rescue Service

- Many Fire and Rescue Services offer a free home fire safety visit to people living in their area.
- They will inspect your home to help you spot any potential fire hazards and show you what to do to reduce or prevent the risk of fire
- They can also help you to develop an escape plan for your property

Source: DirectGov

Fire Risk Assessment

Do we need a Fire Risk Assessment?

The Fire Safety Order came into force in October 2006 and requires a designated responsible person from the residential management company to carry out a risk assessment and take steps to reduce or remove the risk of fire.

The legislation is not onerous, it simply imposes a duty to keep a watching brief in very much the same way that any responsible management company will do as a matter of course, for example ensuring that fire exits are properly maintained and that inappropriate materials are not stored in common areas.

If you need further guidance on fire safety, log on to:
www.communities.gov.uk/fire/firesafety/firesafetylaw

There you will find full guidance for common areas of flats or maisonettes by downloading:

- Fire Safety Risk Assessment Sleeping Accommodation

- A Short Fire Risk Assessment form which is in word format and can be downloaded from the same page
- The Regulatory form Fire Safety Order 2005, A Short Guide to making your Premises Safe from Fire