FIRE SAFETY FOR SENIORS

Fire Department, City of New York
Bureau of Training, Fire Safety Education • www.nyc/fdny.gov

Fire Department,
City of New York
9 MetroTech Center
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Bill de Blasio, Mayor
Daniel A. Nigro, Fire Commissioner

Funding for this publication provided by:

FDNY FOUNDATION

www.fdnyfoundation.org

Photos by Randy Barron and Iwona Gardner
Graphic Design by Samantha C.S. Jones, ChameleonIllustration.com

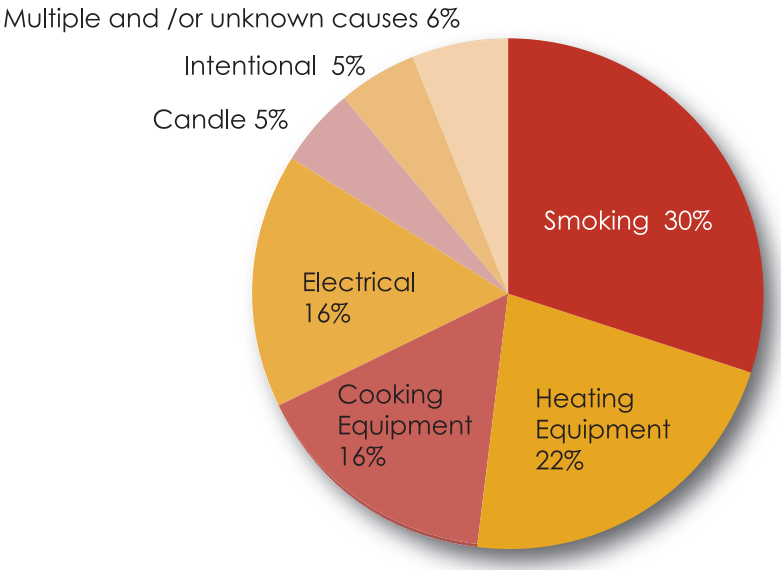
TABLE OF CONTENTS

This booklet is designed to inform seniors and their caregivers about fire safety. It's a fact that older adults, aged 65 and more, die in home fires far more often than the rest of the population. However, you can retire fire by taking care of yourself and influencing others, such as your neighbors, friends and family, about fire safety.

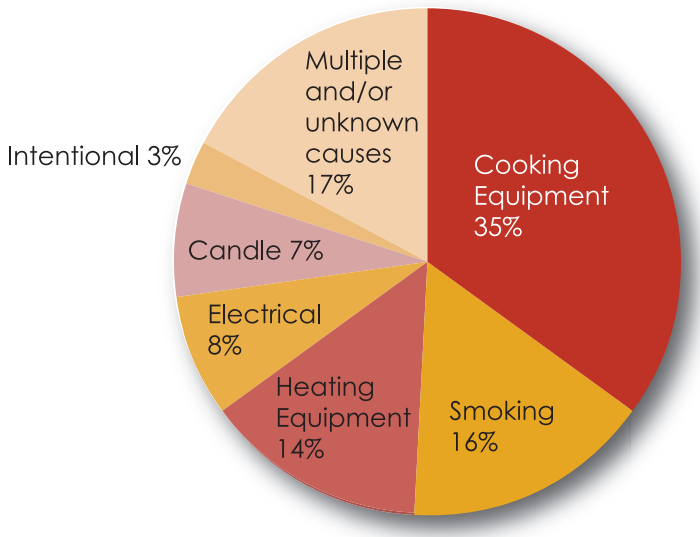
People can and have saved their own lives and the lives of others by following a few simple safety precautions.

Prevent Smoking Fires	**Page 2**
Prevent Electrical Fires	**Page 3**
Prevent Home Heating Fires	**Page 5**
Prevent Kitchen Fires and Injuries	**Page 7**
Treating A Burn	**Page 9**
Clothing Fires	**Page 10**
Fire Escape Planning	**Page 11**
Know What to Do	**Page 13**
Smoke Alarm Maintenance	**Page 15**
Home Fire Safety Checklist	**Page 16**

Leading Causes of Fire Deaths in the Home for Adults 65 Years of Age and Older



Leading Causes of Fire Injuries in the Home for Adults 65 Years of Age and Older



Statistics taken from "Characteristics of Home Fire Victims," NFPA, July 2008

PREVENT SMOKING FIRES

SMOKERS BEWARE

Smokers are seven times more likely than nonsmokers to be fire victims. Smoking materials are the NUMBER ONE cause of home fires that kill seniors.

If you or others in your home smoke, prevent fires before they start:

- Use large, deep, non-tip ashtrays. Never leave a lighted cigarette in an ashtray or leave an ashtray on the arm of a couch or chair.

- Before going to bed or going out, check between, on and under upholstery and cushions for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.

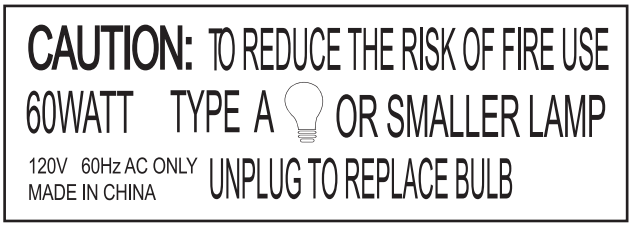
- Douse cigarette butts completely with water before discarding them.

- Make it a **RULE** to never smoke in bed or while lying down, especially when you are drowsy or taking medication that makes you sleepy.

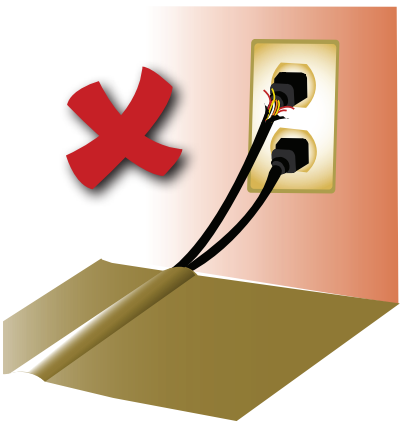
- **NEVER** permit smoking around the storage or use of an oxygen tank.

PREVENT ELECTRICAL FIRES

• Use light bulbs with the appropriate wattage for the size of the light fixture. A bulb with too many watts may lead to overheating and fire.



• Give televisions, stereos and computers plenty of clearance to prevent over-heating.

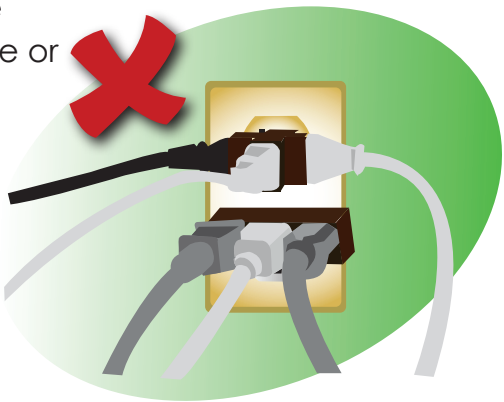


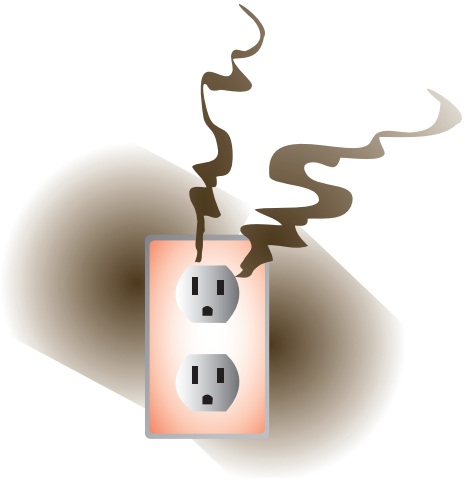
• Use extension cords for temporary use only.

• Protect all electrical cords from damage. Do not run cords under carpets or rugs, or hang them from nails.

• Never use an appliance with a damaged or frayed cord.

• To prevent overloading, never plug more than two appliances into an outlet at once or "piggyback" extra appliances on extension cords or wall outlets.





• Ensure that outlet and switch plates are in good condition. If the outlet or plate is hot to the touch, immediately unplug the cord and have a qualified electrician check your wiring.

• If an appliance develops a different smell, makes unusual sounds or the cord feels warm to the touch, pull the plug and discontinue use.

If the appliance continues to burn or smoke, call the Fire Department (911).

• Replace unsafe electrical appliances, such as coffee makers and toaster ovens.

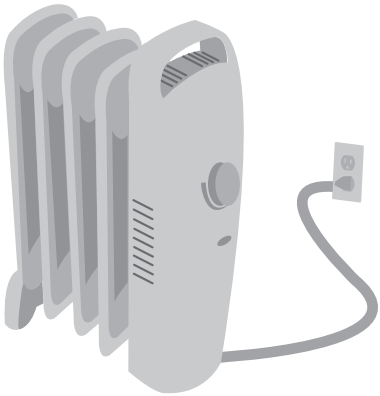
• When purchasing an electrical appliance, such as a toaster or coffee maker, be sure that the equipment has the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) Mark, which shows that the product has been safety tested.

⚠ WARNING

The potential for electrical shock or fire from electrical wiring and appliances is very real.

PREVENT HOME HEATING FIRES

SPACE HEATER SAFETY



- When purchasing an electric space heater, look for heaters with automatic shut-off features.
- Only use equipment that has the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) Mark, which shows that the product has been safety tested.
- **Give space heaters space.** Place the heater at least three feet from any combustible material, such as bedding and furniture.
- Keep young children and pets away from space heaters.
- While heater cords normally become warm during use, stop using the heater if the cord becomes hot.
- **NEVER** use an extension cord with a space heater.

Many people use space heaters during cold weather months. However, space heaters are responsible for two out of every three home-heating fires.

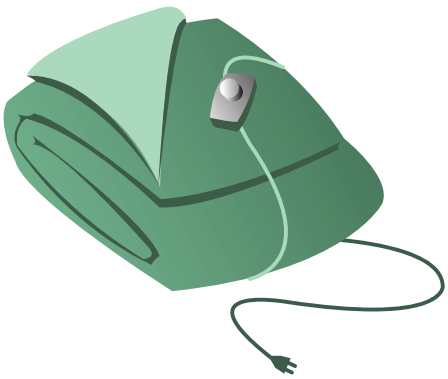
- Place the heater on the floor; never place on a counter top or furniture.
- Turn off/unplug the space heater whenever you leave the room or go to sleep.

WARNING

The use of kerosene or propane space heaters is strictly prohibited and illegal in New York City. These space heaters pose a high risk of death and injury.

ELECTRIC BLANKET SAFETY

- Only use electric blankets that have the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) Mark, which shows that the product has been safety tested.
- Discontinue the use of any electric blanket that has broken or frayed cords.
- Avoid tucking the electric blanket in at the sides of the bed. This can cause excessive heat build-up.



- Avoid placing other blankets or comforters on top of an electric blanket while it is in use.
- Never use an electric blanket that is wet, soiled or wrinkled.
- It is best to warm the bed with your electric blanket and turn it off before going to bed.
- Wash your electric blanket infrequently, because repeated washings can damage the electrical circuitry.

If your electric blanket is more than 10 years old, the best advice is to buy a new one!

Old or damaged electric blankets cause thousands of fires a year that result in deaths and injuries.

PREVENT KITCHEN FIRES AND INJURIES

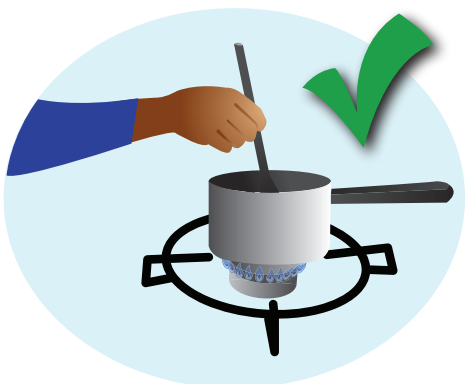
Remember to "stand by your pan" and never leave cooking food unattended. Heat cooking oils gradually and use extra caution when deep-frying.

Always wear short or tight-fitting sleeves. Long, loose sleeves are more likely to catch fire, and exposed skin could burn. Turn pot handles inward toward back of stove to prevent accidental bumping of pan and causing a scald injury.
Use oven mitts to protect hands and arms from burns.

Cooking accidents are the leading cause of fire and fire injuries in the home.

Cook at low to medium temperature settings. To prevent scalds, let microwave heated foods, and liquids stand for a minute or two before touching.

Loose sleeves catch fire easily



Always wear secured or short sleeves when cooking

⚠ *TO PREVENT HOT WATER SCALDS:*

To prevent hot water scalds, set hot water heater thermostats at 110 degrees F. For added safety, install anti-scald devices on all faucets.

RECIPE FOR KITCHEN SAFETY

Follow this recipe for safety and you will prevent most cooking fires and burn injuries.

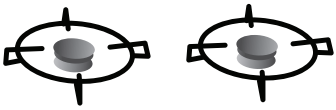
Ingredients:

2 watchful eyes

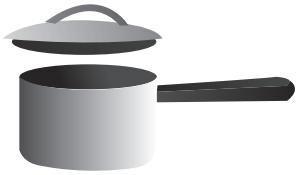
1 or 2 potholders/ oven mitts

2 short or tight-fitting sleeves

1 clean area around the stove, free of anything that can burn



1 pot lid



1 large box of baking soda

Should a stove fire occur:

- Turn off the stove.
- Use baking soda to extinguish the flame.
- Slide the pan lid onto the pan.

⚠ *DO NOT USE WATER!*

Water will cause splashing and spread the fire.

Do not attempt to pick up the pot or pan and carry it away from the stove.

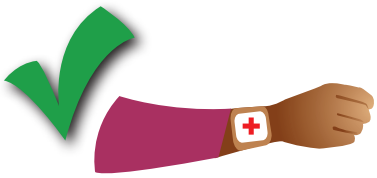
TREATING A BURN

Burns can be caused by direct contact with an open flame, hot liquids/ grease or from a hot surface. Many burns may be deeper than they appear and require immediate medical attention. Remove clothing from affected area, but do not attempt to remove clothing that sticks.

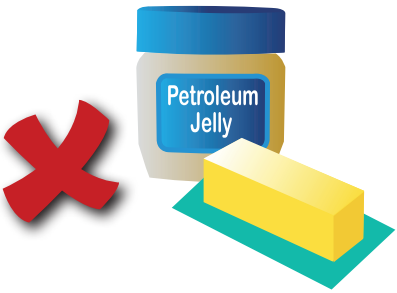
If you get a burn:

Treat with cool running water.

Older adults usually have a more severe reaction to burns.



Cover the burn with a sterile pad or clean sheet.



Never apply ointment, grease or butter to the burned area.

Seek immediate medical attention to prevent burn inflammation and infections.

⚠ *FOR CHEMICAL AND ELECTRICAL BURNS:*

For chemical burns, caused by products such as oven or bathroom cleaners: Flush with cool water for 20 to 30 minutes. If eyes are affected, also flush for at least 20 minutes.

For electrical burns, turn off electrical source before touching victim. Check victim for pulse and breathing, start CPR if needed. Care-givers are encouraged to learn CPR.

CLOTHING FIRES

IF ANY PART OF YOU OR YOUR CLOTHING CATCHES FIRE:

- Cover your face with your hands.

- Drop to the ground.

- Roll over and over.

If physical limitations prevent you from taking these steps, try to smother the flames with a fire-resistant wool blanket or rug.

REMEMBER

Do not try to fight the fire yourself.
DO NOT RUN or try to put out the fire with your hands.

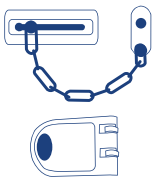
FIRE ESCAPE PLANNING

DON'T BE SCARED - BE PREPARED

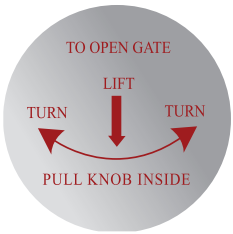
- Make sure a phone is next to your bed and within reach (or a TTY/TDD device, if you use one).

- Keep your eyeglasses, keys, and hearing aids (if necessary) within reach next to your bed.

- Make sure lamp or light switches are within reach.



- Practice unlocking and opening the windows, security gates and doors.



- Keep stairways and exits clear of clutter and storage. Do not store anything on building fire escapes.

Can you survive a fire in your home?

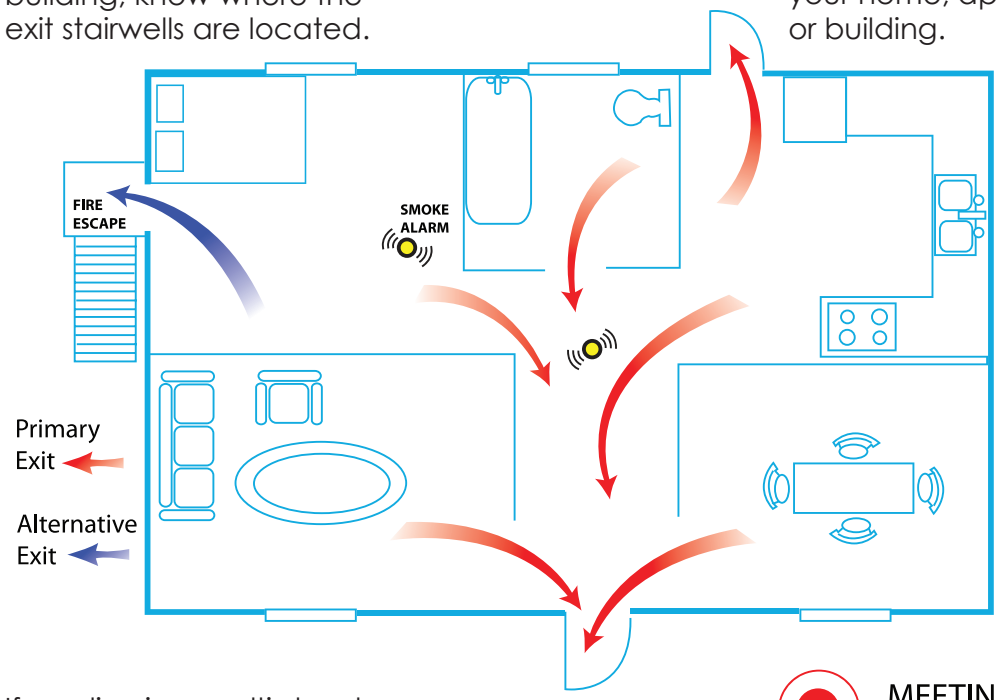
More than 50% of home fire deaths occur between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., when most people are sleeping.

Be prepared by having an escape plan. It is one of the most important steps you can take to save your own life!

ESCAPE PLAN

If you live in an apartment building, know where the exit stairwells are located.

Know two exits from your home, apartment, or building.



If you live in a multi-story home, consider sleeping on the ground floor near an exit.

If your fire escape window has security bars or a gate, make sure it is FDNY approved for fire escape windows. *(Approved gates are stamped with the FDNY approval number.)*

APPROVED
"EASY OUT" FIRE ESCAPE GATE
Patent Pending _____
Approved by the Fire Department of the City of New York
Certificate of Approval No. 1234
Manufactured by: ABC Gate Company
Serial #: _____ Brooklyn, NY 11210
Model #: 5678 Tel: (718) 555-5555
Manufacturer will rectify any manufacuring defects in the gate upon notification

KNOW WHAT TO DO

If there is a fire in your home or apartment:

- Do not try to fight the fire yourself.
- Do not stop to gather personal belongings.

- Get out by implementing your fire escape plan, using the closest or safest exit.
- If smoke is present, stay as low to the floor as possible and cover your mouth.

- Close the door on your way out.

- Use stairways to exit the building.

DO NOT USE THE ELEVATOR.

If you are trapped, close all the doors between you and the fire and call 911 Tell the dispatcher where you are located.

If you live in a residential apartment building:

NON-FIRE PROOF BUILDINGS:

If there is a fire in your building, but not your apartment and you live in a *non-fire proof* building, it is safer to *leave the building immediately*.

- Implement your fire escape plan by using the closest or safest exit.

- Check the apartment door with the back of your hand. If it is hot, do not open the door. Retreat to your fire escape window.

- If the door is cool, but there is smoke in the hallway, assess the situation and your own abilities to exit safely from the building. Stay as low to the floor as possible and cover your mouth. Close the door on your way out!

- Use stairways to exit from the building. **DO NOT USE THE ELEVATOR.**

If you determine there is too much smoke in the hallway, close your apartment door and exit from your fire escape window.

FIRE PROOF BUILDINGS:

If there is a fire in your building, but not in your apartment and you live in a *fire proof* building, it is safer to *stay inside* and keep the door closed. Call 911 and give the dispatcher your apartment number.

Contact your building owner regarding your building's fire safety plan and construction type. Planning is the key to protecting yourself and your family.

SMOKE ALARM MAINTENANCE

Follow these safety tips to ensure that you will have an early warning in case of fire:

A smoke alarm is the single most valuable life-saving device you can have in your home.

• Install a smoke alarm outside and inside each bedroom or sleeping area and on every level of your home.

• Chirping alarms are warnings that the battery is low. Replace batteries twice a year, in spring and fall, when clocks are changed for daylight-saving time.

• Purchase alarms with a 10-year lithium battery to eliminate the need to change the batteries every six months. Lithium batteries are more expensive than typical 9-volt batteries; however, they are designed to last the life of the alarm. However, the alarm battery still must be tested once a month.

• If you are hearing-impaired, install smoke alarms with strobe (flashing) lights. These alarms feature a special, high-density light that can wake a sleeping person.

• Install smoke alarms with a hush or silence button feature for nuisance alarms due to cooking vapors or steam. Rather than removing the battery, this feature allows you to silence the unit for 10 to 15 minutes while you clear the air. Some smoke alarms can be temporarily silenced and tested by using a TV remote.

• Install photoelectric-type smoke alarms, which are the most reliable for smoldering fires, which often occur in bedrooms or sitting rooms.

HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKLIST

Use this check list as a guide to identify possible fire safety problems in your home. If you check NO to any question, the potential hazard should be corrected to reduce your risk and increase your preparedness for fire.

YES	NO	
☐	☐	Do you have at least one operable smoke alarm?
☐	☐	Do you have at least one operable carbon monoxide alarm?
☐	☐	Are all electrical cords in good condition (not frayed or cracked)?
☐	☐	Are all electrical cords in the open, not run under rugs or through doorways?
☐	☐	Are space heaters placed at least three feet from combustibles?
☐	☐	Are space heaters plugged directly into wall sockets and not into extension cords?
☐	☐	Is your apartment door fireproof and self-closing?
☐	☐	Is your fire escape window clear and unobstructed?
☐	☐	If you have a security gate, is it FDNY approved?
☐	☐	Can all windows be opened easily from the inside?
☐	☐	Are building stairways free of storage and rubbish?
☐	☐	Are stairway fire doors fireproof, self-closing, and kept closed?
☐	☐	Are exit lights in the stairway in good working order?
☐	☐	Do you have operable flashlights handy?
☐	☐	Do you have a fire escape plan?

Immediately correct problems or hazards that are within your control or responsibility. Notify the building owner of all other problems. If necessary, you may file a complaint by calling the New York City Fire Department at 718-999-2541 or 311.

Fire Department,
City of New York
9 MetroTech Center
Brooklyn, New York
11201

Bill de Blasio,
Mayor

Daniel A. Nigro,
Fire Commissioner

For more fire safety information contact
the Fire Safety Education Unit at 718-281-3870