

July Ground Safety

This month's focus is on fire safety. Included are tips for fire safety and common myths about fires.

Hot Tips for Fire Safety

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home so that family members can hear them wherever they are.
- Never disconnect smoke alarms or borrow the batteries.
- Create a home escape plan. Practice it.
- Never smoke in bed or when drowsy.
- Wear clothes with short or snug sleeves while cooking so that they won't catch fire.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, well away from children.
- Keep combustible materials, such as kitchen towels and newspapers, away from heat sources, such as candles, burners and portable heaters.
- Have professionals check the fireplace and furnace annually, and clean if necessary.
- Don't overload electrical circuits.
- In case of fire, leave your home immediately. Don't try to save anything. Call the fire department from a neighbor's house.

Typical myths about fires

Myth: The smoke from fire isn't the real danger.

Fact: Smoke kills more people than burns do. In a matter of minutes, fire robs the air of oxygen and fills it with carbon monoxide and other deadly gases. "Unless you experience a fire, you have no idea how great its devastation is. Toxic smoke fills the home, you're frightened, and you can't get to your children or to your spouse. You may only have 2, 3 or 4 minutes before it's impossible to be alive," says Dennis Compton, fire chief of the Mesa, Ariz., Fire Department.

Myth: Matches, lighters and lit tobacco products aren't big fire culprits anymore.

Fact: "Fires are most likely to occur at night when people are asleep, and most fatal fires are from smoking material," says Susan McKelvey, spokesperson at NFPA. Never smoke in bed or when you're sleepy. Extinguish smoking materials thoroughly because ashes can smolder and start a fire.

Myth: You can leave home while food is in the oven.

Fact: Most house fires start in the kitchen. Turn your oven and burners off if you must leave the kitchen while cooking. Keep your oven and stovetop clean because grease and spilled food can start a fire.

Myth: Portable heaters can safely keep you warm through the night.

Fact: Portable heaters are meant to provide extra heat for a short time, not while you're sleeping, says Walt Biddle, executive director of the National Electrical Safety Foundation. Keep portable heaters 3 feet away from bedding, furniture and other combustible materials. Never leave them on when sleeping or when out of the room.

Myth: Flickering lights can be ignored.

Fact: Dimming of lights, blown fuses, tripped circuit breakers, frayed cords and other electric problems may mean you're stretching the system's capacity, and fire is a risk. Have a professional electrician check your electrical system.

Myth: Your basement is a good place to store gasoline.

Fact: Flammable liquids like gasoline should never be brought into or stored inside the home where they

July Ground Safety

could come into contact with heat or flames. Gasoline fumes travel and can be ignited by a tiny spark. Store all flammable liquids in metal containers. Store gasoline in special vented containers.

Myth: Only schools need fire drills.

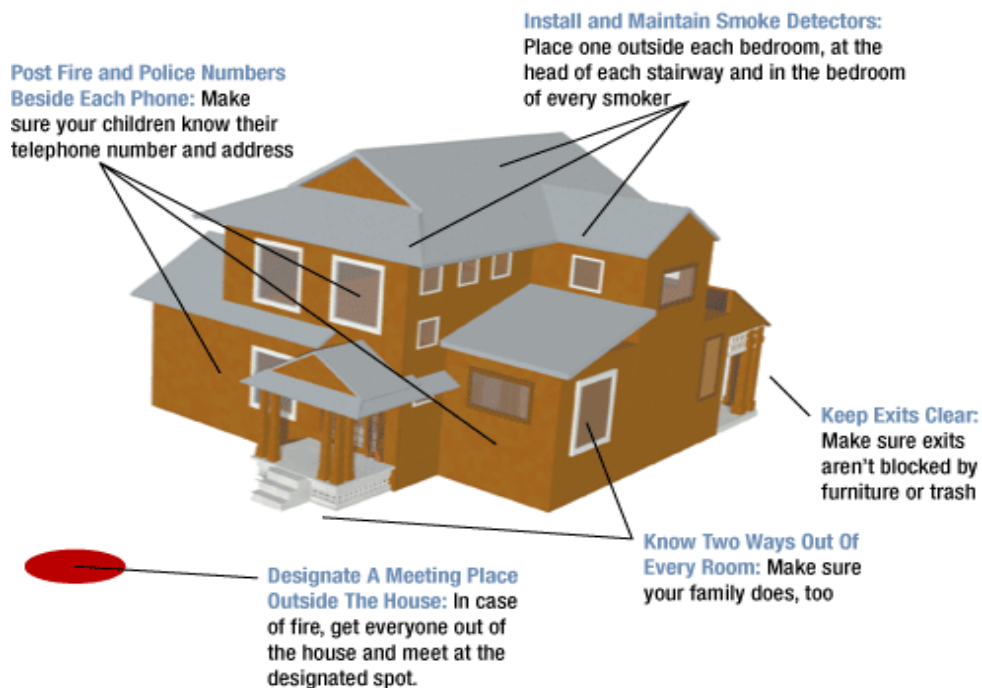
Fact: People think they know their home so well that they don't have to plan an escape, but it's important to have all systems in place before a fire. Bob and Betty Walker, of Warton, Ontario, helped their twins, Ryan and Ashley, then 9 years old, create an escape plan in the fall of 1998. They found two ways out of each room, practiced their routes, and chose a meeting place outside. A few months later, a fire erupted in an apartment under their daughter's room. With no time to spare, the family followed their plan, waking their children with the word "fire" and walking quickly outside toward their meeting place. "The little 5 minute inconvenience of planning shaved a minute or two off the time to get out. That was the time my little girl needed to leave her room safely," says Bob Walker.

Myth: Smoke alarms last a lifetime.

Fact: Like other electronic devices, smoke alarms won't last forever. Replace them every 10 years. A smoke alarm reduces the risk of dying in a fire by almost 50 percent, according to the NFPA, but nearly 1,200 children die each year in homes without working alarms. Keep smoke alarms connected and working. Replace low batteries immediately and all batteries annually. Hit the "test" button each month to check the alarm. A chirp signals a low battery.

Myth: Homes with smoke alarms don't need automatic fire sprinklers.

Fact: Alarms let you know there's a fire, but they don't put them out. Residential fire sprinklers link to water pipes hidden behind the walls and ceiling. They're made to extinguish or control home fires until the fire department arrives. When hot gases reach the nearest sprinkler head, they cause it to open and spray water on the fire. Katherine Marrs is thankful that fire sprinklers were required in new homes in Scottsdale, Ariz., when she bought hers. She could only stand in the kitchen and watch as flames rose from a pot and danced along the ceiling. With her daughter on one side of the pot and sister on the other, she thought, "How do I put it out? How do I save everyone?" Suddenly, she, her daughter and her sister were drenched in water. The sprinkler had opened, and the fire was out.



**Read All The Safety Tips In This Section
and Practice Fire Tips Regularly**

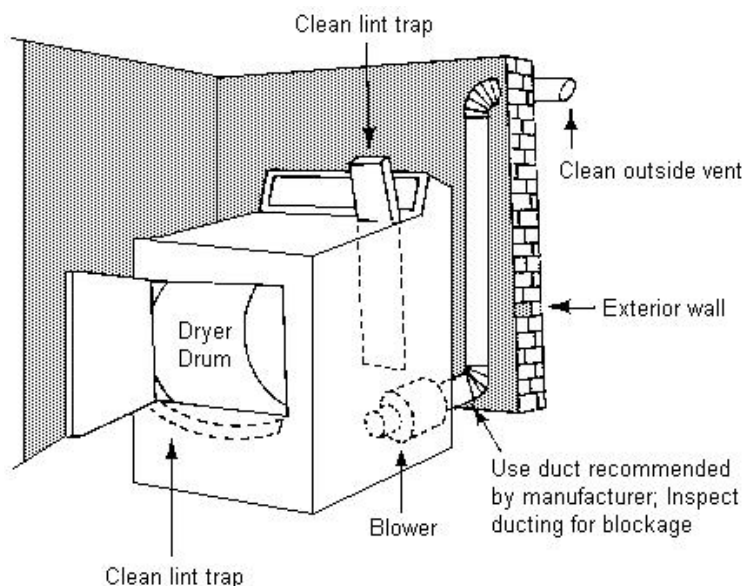
July Ground Safety

Consumer Product Safety Commission

Overheated Clothes Dryers Can Cause Fires

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that there are an estimated annual 15,500 fires, 10 deaths, and 310 injuries associated with clothes dryers. Some of these fires may occur when lint builds up in the filter or in the exhaust duct. Under certain conditions, when lint blocks the flow of air, excessive heat build-up may cause a fire in some dryers. To prevent fires:

- Clean the lint filter regularly and make sure the dryer is operating properly. Clean the filter after each load of clothes. While the dryer is operating, check the outside exhaust to make sure exhaust air is escaping normally. If it is not, look inside both ends of the duct and remove any lint. If there are signs that the dryer is hotter than normal, this may be a sign that the dryer's temperature control thermostat needs servicing.
- Check the exhaust duct more often if you have a plastic, flexible duct. This type of duct is more apt to trap lint than ducting without ridges.
- Closely follow manufacturers' instructions for new installations. Most manufacturers that get their clothes dryers approved by Underwriters Laboratories specify the use of metal exhaust duct. If metal duct is not available at the retailer where the dryer was purchased, check other locations, such as hardware or builder supply stores. If you are having the dryer installed, insist upon metal duct unless the installer has verified that the manufacturer permits the use of plastic duct.



The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission protects the public from the unreasonable risk of injury or death from 15,000 types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, you can go to [CPSC's forms page](#) and use the first on-line form on that page. Or, you can call CPSC's hotline at (800) 638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at (800) 638-8270, or

July Ground Safety

send the information to info@cpsc.gov. Consumers can obtain this publication and additional publication information from the [Publications section](#) of CPSC's web site or by sending your publication request to publications@cpsc.gov. If you would like to receive CPSC's recall notices, subscribing to the email list will send all press releases to you the day they are issued.

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