

Fire Safety Facts for People 50-Plus

Each year, approximately 1,100 Americans ages 65 and older die as a result of a home fire. Compared to the rest of the U. S. population:

- People between 65 and 74 are nearly TWICE as likely to die in a fire.
- People between 75 and 84 are nearly FOUR times as likely to die in a fire.
- People ages 85 and older are more than FIVE times as likely to die in a fire.

With a few simple steps, older people can dramatically reduce their risk of death and injury from fire. These facts, combined with the knowledge that adults ages 50 and older are entering and caring for this high risk group, inspired the U. S. Fire Administration (USFA), a division of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, to develop a national public safety campaign for adults ages 50 and older, their families and caregivers. USFA encourages you to:

Prevent Fire. Save Lives.

For your well-being and others you love: Practice fire-safe behaviors when smoking, cooking and heating. Maintain smoke alarms, develop and practice a fire escape plan, and if possible, install home fire sprinklers.

Smoke Safely

Sitting in your favorite chair and having a cigarette after dinner seems to some like a great way to relax – but cigarettes and relaxing can be a deadly mix. Falling asleep while smoking can ignite clothing, rugs and other materials used in upholstered furniture. Using alcohol and medications that make you sleepy compound this hazard.

Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths and the second leading cause of injuries among people ages 65 and older. Cigarettes when not properly extinguished continue to burn. When a resting cigarette is accidentally knocked over, it can smolder for hours before a flare-up occurs. Before you light your next cigarette, remember:

- Never smoke in bed.
- Put your cigarette or cigar out at the first sign of feeling drowsy while watching television or reading.
- Use deep ashtrays and put your cigarettes all the way out.
- Don't walk away from lit cigarettes and other smoking materials.

Cook Safely

Many families gather in the kitchen to spend time together, but it can be one of the most hazardous rooms in the house if you don't practice safe cooking behaviors. Cooking is the third leading cause of fire deaths and the leading cause of injury among people ages 65 and older.

It's a recipe for serious injury or even death to wear loose clothing (especially hanging sleeves), walk away from a cooking pot on the stove, or leave flammable materials, such as potholders or paper towels, around the stove. Whether you are cooking the family holiday dinner or a snack for the grandchildren:

- Never leave cooking unattended. A serious fire can start in just seconds.
- Always wear short or tight-fitting sleeves when you cook. Keep towels, pot holders and curtains away from flames.
- Never use the range or oven to heat your home.
- Double-check the kitchen before you go to bed or leave the house.

Heat Your Home Safely

During winter months, December, January and February, there are more home fires than any other time of year. Heating devices like space heaters and wood stoves make homes comfortable, but should be used with extra caution. Heating is the second leading cause of fire death and the third leading cause of injury to people ages 65 and older.

Many of these deaths and injuries could be prevented with safe heating practices. So before you grab a good book and cozy up to the fireplace, make sure you do the following:

- Keep fire in the fireplace by making sure you have a screen large enough to catch flying sparks and rolling logs.
- Space heaters need space. Keep flammable materials at least three feet away from heaters.
- When buying a space heater, look for a control feature that automatically shuts off the power if the heater falls over.

The “Get Out Alive” Home Fire Safety Steps

- **Smoke Alarms:** Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home, test batteries every month and change them at least once a year.
- **Home Fire Escape Plan:** Develop and practice a fire escape plan regularly, at least twice a year. Keep exits clear of debris.
- **Home Fire Sprinklers:** If at all possible, install residential sprinklers in your home.