

a **Guide**
To Help Prevent
Fire Damage

Fire damage in your home can be costly and emotionally devastating. The damage caused by the flames and smoke can destroy a lifetime of memories in a matter of minutes. Taking steps to prevent such a disaster will help save your belongings, costly repairs to your house and could potentially save lives. This guide will help identify areas of concern around your home and provide you with tips to help protect you and your family.

SMOKE DETECTORS

As one of the first and most important lines of defence, the installation of smoke detectors have become law. Check your local or provincial legislation to ensure your house is up to code. The early detection of smoke can help save your home and most importantly your life.

There are some important items to remember with regard to location, installation and testing. Fire Prevention Canada recommends the following tips to keep your smoke detector working efficiently:

Location and Installation

- The alarm should be mounted on the ceiling in the center of the room, hall or stairway
- Optimum location for wall mounts is at least 6" from the ceiling but no more than 30"
- Avoid installing an alarm close to doors or windows
- Never locate your alarm near an air register, fan or vent
- Keep alarms at least 2 feet from any corner
- If your alarm is connected to the wiring system of a house, you should always use a qualified electrician to do the installation and ensure you check the alarm after installation is complete

Testing (recommended every six months)

- Ensure power is being transmitted to the alarm and it will activate in the presence of smoke
- Test your alarm by pressing the test button
- Even alarms with a pilot light should be tested
- Although battery operated devices warn you when they need to be changed, the batteries should be changed every six months. An easy way to remember is to change the smoke detector batteries when the clocks change.

Types of Detectors

There are two main types of detectors on the market. Each one is designed to detect a different type of fire.

Photo electronic detector

This type of alarm is better at detecting smouldering fires where there is a large amount of smoke produced but little flame at first. This should be your number one choice.

Ionization detector

This type of alarm works best near highly combustible material where there is a large amount of flames but little smoke. These are most effective in your kitchen.





FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Although smoke detectors are considered the most important tool in your fire safety kit, it's also very important to have fire extinguishers on hand. The standard five-pound model is the most popular because it's lightweight and easy to use. Extinguishers come in different designations depending on what type of fire they should be used on:

- 'A' Designation – Ordinary materials such as paper or wood
- 'B' Designation – Highly combustible material like cooking oil
- 'C' Designation – Electrical fires
- 'ABC' Designation – Can be used on all types of fires

Extinguishers come in two materials – metal and plastic. The metal extinguishers are refillable and the plastic ones are disposable.

FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

"78 percent of deaths from fire occur in the home, with most of the fatalities taking place between 2 am and 4 am, while occupants are asleep" – Fire Prevention Canada

Fire can move very quickly throughout your home and thick black smoke builds up just as fast, making it impossible to see. The speed in which your home can become engulfed in flames makes it imperative to have a Fire Escape Plan.

The following are some important things to remember when planning what to do in the event of a fire in your home:

- Install smoke detectors on each floor
- Draw floor plans showing all possible exits from each room in order to react quickly
- Practice crawling out of your exits at night to escape, just how you would in the event of a real fire
- Make sure everyone in your family understands that when the smoke alarm goes off or someone yells "FIRE", they need to evacuate
- Designate a meeting place outside the home
- Purchase a fire extinguisher and learn how to use it
- If someone in your home is unable to evacuate without assistance, assign someone to assist them

PLEASE NOTE: These are only some of the important things to remember when creating your Fire Escape Plan. Check with your local fire department to get a complete list.

FIRE PROOF YOUR HOME

It's important to do everything possible to reduce the risk of having a fire in your home. This includes checking everything from the garage, bedrooms, living room, kitchen, roof, yard, and chimney. The following tips are a starting point in fire prevention around your home:

Smoking

Smoking is one of the leading causes of house fires. The best thing to do for the health and safety of you and your family is not to smoke at all. However, if you do smoke you should consider the following:

- Do not smoke in the house at all
- If you smoke in your garage, make sure there is no flammable material close by
- If you smoke outside, ensure there is no flammable debris that could catch fire from a spark
- Always make sure you dispose of your cigarette butt in a safe manner

Kitchen

- Keep pot-handles turned in and over the stove while cooking to reduce accidents
- Wear close fitted clothing while cooking
- Ensure any flammable material is kept a safe distance from the stove
- Keep your kitchen free and clean of any greasy mess, including the hood and fan filters

If you have a small pan fire

- Put on an oven mitt
- Slide a cookie pan or lid over top of the fire to cut off the oxygen
- Turn off the burner
- Remove towels and food containers from the area
- Leave pan covered and in place

Bedroom

- Never smoke in bed
- Keep escape ladders in upper bedrooms
- Install one smoke alarm above each sleeping area

Living room

- Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors
- Remove any stacks of newspaper or other materials that could be a hazard
- Keep space heaters at least one meter away from anything that can burn
- Ensure all light fixtures are outfitted with the proper wattage bulbs





FIREPLACES, WOODSTOVES AND CHIMNEYS

Maintenance of your fireplace, woodstove and chimney is vital to ensure that your family is safe while enjoying the warm glow of an evening fire. Whether it's a gas or wood fireplace, there are tips that you should follow:

Wood fireplace

- Open the damper before starting a wood fire
- Leave flue open, even if it's only smouldering
- Use a chain mesh screen to prevent sparks from igniting the carpet, furniture or drapery
- Do not use lighter fluid to start a fire
- Have your chimney inspected annually
- Keep the top of your chimney and roof clear of debris
- Do not use charcoal in your fireplace as it presents a danger of carbon monoxide poisoning

Gas fireplace

- Ensure you have two valves or locations to shut off the gas in case one malfunctions
- Be aware of any unusual smells or flames

Woodstoves

- The stove, chimney connectors and joints, chimney flue and chimney must be clean and free from damage like rust or cracks
- Proper installation is crucial (ensure yours is certified by CSA, ULC or Warnock Hershey)
- Use metal covered flooring insulation under the flooring to protect from sparks
- Wet ashes before you dispose of them
- Inspect flue pipes yearly for rust and other damage
- Ensure the chimney contains an acceptable liner (firebrick, clay, clay tiles, concrete, pumice, cast iron, and rigid and flexible stainless steel)

SIGNS TO ENSURE YOUR STOVE IS RUNNING PROPERLY

- Ensure there are flames (burning wood always produces flames except when it's down to the charcoal stage)
- Your fire bricks should be tan in colour (not black)
- Exhaust from chimney should be clear or white (not blue or grey)

PLEASE NOTE: Do not empty your woodstove into your compost before wetting them! The embers can burn for days and the result could be a devastating fire.

ELECTRICAL

Electrical fires are another major cause of damage to the home. Faulty outlets and old wiring are the main cause of most electrical fires. Home appliances such as ovens, stoves, dryers and so forth also cause a great number of fires in the home.

The following are safety tips to help keep you and your family safe:

- Routinely check appliances and wiring
- Use electrical cords wisely and don't overload them
- If any cords look frayed or worn down, replace them
- Don't force three pronged plugs into two pronged outlets or extension cords

GARAGE

- Only fire-rated doors should connect the garage to living areas
- Don't keep gas or other flammable solvents in the garage
- All dangerous liquids should be stored in clearly marked containers that can withstand any expansion from gas

ROOF

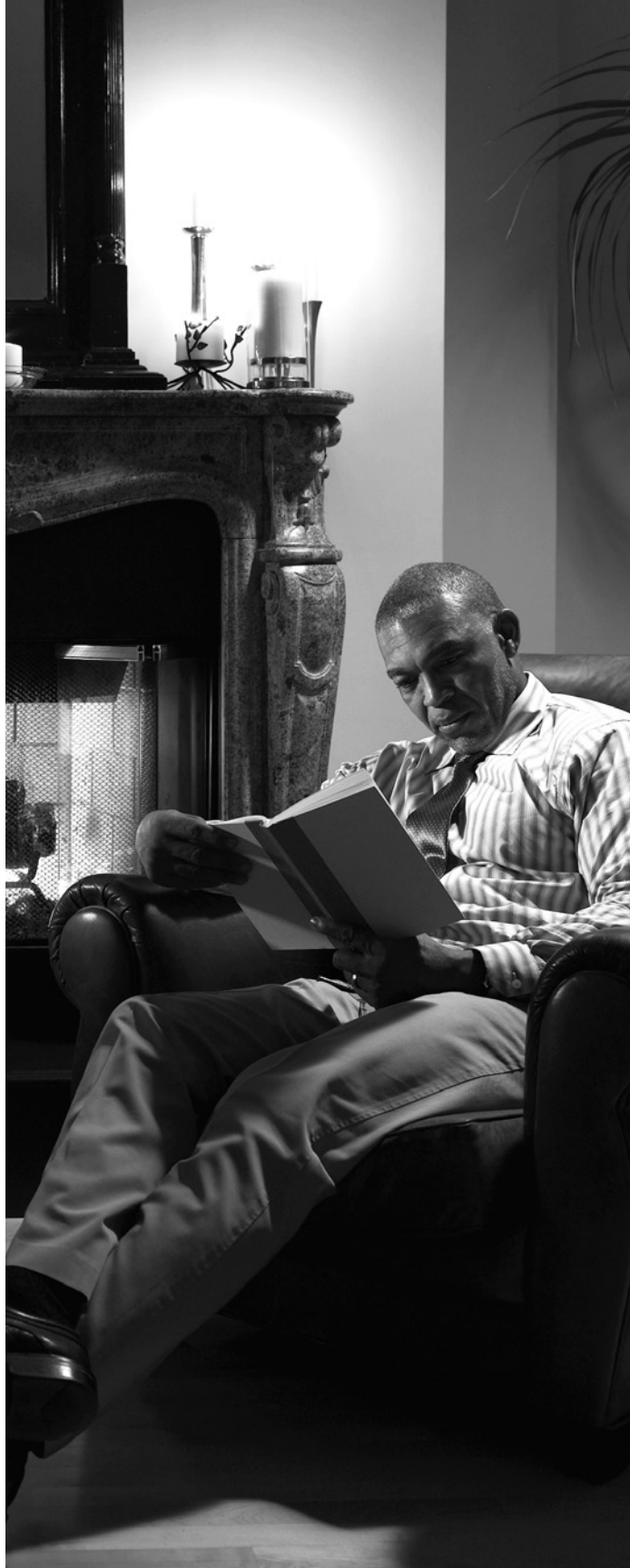
- Ensure your roof is made with fire-resistant materials such as clay, metal and asphalt shingles
- Trim any over-hanging branches that could spread a fire to and from your roof
- Eavestroughs and gutters should be cleared regularly to avoid any flammable build-up of leaves and other materials

WINTER SAFETY

During the winter season there is usually an increase in the number of fires in Canada. People tend to do all their activities indoors such as cooking, drying their clothes and smoking. Also, the house must be heated by space heaters, fireplaces and other types of appliances.

The following are some tips from Fire Prevention Canada on winter safety:

- Ensure heating appliances are not located near anything combustible
- Electrical and heating systems can fail, they should be checked by a professional





Anyone who has experienced a fire in their home knows how tragic it can be. The greatest form of prevention starts with you, the homeowner. By following these steps and tips, your home and loved ones will hopefully be that much more safe

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