

# Fact Sheet

# Fires

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Each year, more than 4,000 Americans die and more than 25,000 are injured in fires, many of which could be prevented. Direct property loss due to fires is estimated at \$8.6 billion annually. Fire spreads quickly; there is no time to gather valuables or make a phone call. In just two minutes, a fire can become life-threatening; in five minutes, a residence can be engulfed in flames.

## Know Your Risk and What to Do

- Contact your local fire department to learn about fire safety and prevention.
- Get additional information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)), the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)) and the National Fire Protection Association ([www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)).
- Conduct fire drills with your family and make sure everyone knows what to do during a fire.
- Make a family disaster plan that includes out-of-town contacts and neighborhood locations to reunite if you become separated. Be sure everyone knows home, work and cell phone numbers, and how to call 9-1-1.
- Assemble a 3-day disaster supplies kit with food, water, medical supplies, battery-powered radio and NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, batteries, flashlights, and other items. If you have space and you are concerned about situations that might require lengthy shelter, consider storing food and water supplies for up to a month. For more information about assembling a disaster supplies kit, visit [www.fema.gov/areyouready/](http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/).
- Gather important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, Social Security cards, passports, wills, deeds, and financial and insurance records. Store them in a fire and flood safe location or safe deposit box.

## Before a Fire

- Install smoke alarms. Properly working smoke alarms decrease your chances of dying in a fire by half.
- Place smoke alarms on every level of your residence. Place them outside bedrooms on the ceiling or high on the wall (4 to 12 inches from ceiling), at the top of open stairways, or at the bottom of enclosed stairs and near (but not in) the kitchen.
- Test and clean smoke alarms once a month and replace batteries at least once a year. Replace smoke alarms once every 10 years.
- Review escape routes with your family. Practice escaping from each room.
- Make sure windows are not nailed or painted shut. Make sure security gratings on windows have a fire safety opening feature so they can be easily opened from the inside.
- Consider escape ladders if your residence has more than one level, and ensure that burglar bars and other anti-theft mechanisms that block outside window entry are easily opened from the inside.
- Teach family members to stay low to the floor (where the air is safer in a fire) when escaping from a fire.
- Clean out storage areas. Do not let trash, such as old newspapers and magazines accumulate.
- Be careful when using alternative heating sources.
- Check with your local fire department on the legality of using kerosene heaters in your community. If you use them, be sure to fill kerosene heaters outside, and be sure they have cooled.
- Place heaters at least three feet away from flammable materials. Make sure the floor and nearby walls are properly insulated. Use only the type of fuel designated for your unit and follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Store ashes in a metal container outside and away from your residence.
- Keep open flames away from walls, furniture, drapery, and flammable items.
- Keep a screen in front of the fireplace.
- Have heating units inspected and cleaned annually by a certified specialist.

## Before a Fire (Continued)

- Never use gasoline, benzine, naphtha, or similar flammable liquids indoors.
- Store flammable liquids in approved containers in well-ventilated storage areas.
- Never smoke near flammable liquids.
- Discard all rags or materials that have been soaked in flammable liquids outdoors in a metal container, away from your house.
- Insulate chimneys and place spark arresters on top. The chimney should be at least three feet higher than the roof. Remove branches hanging above and around the chimney.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, away from children, and, if possible, in a locked cabinet.
- Never smoke in bed or when drowsy or medicated. Provide smokers with deep, sturdy ashtrays. Douse cigarette and cigar butts with water before disposal.
- Have the electrical wiring in your residence checked by an electrician.
- Inspect extension cords for frayed or exposed wires or loose plugs.
- Make sure outlets have cover plates and no exposed wiring.
- Make sure wiring does not run under rugs, over nails, or across high-traffic areas.
- Do not overload extension cords or outlets.
- Make sure wall insulation does not touch bare electrical wiring.

## During a Fire

If your clothes catch on fire, you should:

- Stop, drop, and roll - until the fire is extinguished. Running only makes the fire burn faster.

To escape a fire, you should:

- Check closed doors for heat before you open them. If you are escaping through a closed door, use the back of your hand to feel the top of the door, the doorknob, and the crack between the door and door frame before you open it. Never use the palm of your hand or fingers to test for heat - burning those areas could impair your ability to escape a fire (i.e., ladders and crawling).
- Crawl low under any smoke to your exit - heavy smoke and poisonous gases collect first along the ceiling.
- Close doors behind you as you escape to delay the spread of the fire.
- Stay out once you are safely out. Do not reenter. Call 9-1-1.

## After a Fire

- If you are with burn victims, or are a burn victim yourself, call 9-1-1. Cool and cover burns to reduce chance of further injury or infection.
- If you detect heat or smoke when entering a damaged building, evacuate immediately.
- If you are a tenant, contact the landlord as soon as you escape.
- If you have a safe or strong box, do not try to open it. It can hold intense heat for several hours. If the door is opened before the box has cooled, the contents could burst into flames.

## The Recovery Process

- For direct assistance with immediate needs, contact the American Red Cross or other local voluntary agencies.
- If you have property damage, contact your insurance company as soon as possible.
- For information on helping children deal with disaster, visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) or get a copy of FEMA 478 **Helping Children Cope with Disaster**. To obtain other fact sheets and publications call the FEMA publications warehouse at 1-800-480-2520. You can also visit DHS' [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

Dangerous Fire Myth!	The Facts:
<b>If one sprinkler head goes off, they all go off. Then, you've really got a mess!</b>	Sprinkler heads are designed to react to temperatures in each room individually. Normally, only the sprinkler over the fire will activate. Data show that in residential scenarios, usually one sprinkler will control a developing fire; in commercial buildings, as few as three will do the job.