

# Fire Precautions

Almost all fires in the home can be prevented. Here are some fire safety tips which could help prevent a fire from starting in your home.

## Chip pans and deep fat fryers

**Fact** Cookers were the source of fire in over half the accidental dwelling fires during 1996. Many of these involved chip pans and other utensils left unattended. Most of these fires could have been prevented.

### *What can you do?*

- Before putting food in the pan, dry the food, and test the temperature of the oil by putting in a small piece of bread. If the bread crisps up quickly the oil is ready.
- Never fill a pan more than one-third full of fat or oil.
- If you need to leave the kitchen switch off the pan.
- If the oil begins to smoke the temperature is too high. Turn off the heat source.

### *If the pan does catch fire*

- Don't move it.
- Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so, but never lean over the pan to reach the cooker controls.
- Cover the pan with a damp cloth, for example a damp tea towel, and leave it to cool for at least 30 minutes - never throw water onto the fire.
- Always call the fire brigade. It is free and they will check the fire is safely out.

If you are in any doubt about whether to put out a chip pan fire yourself, then don't. Leave the room, close the door and let the fire brigade tackle the fire.

## Open fires

These should always have a fireguard round them, but never rest clothes or place newspapers on the guard.

## Portable heaters

Don't sit closer than three feet away from a heater. Never put a heater near clothes or furnishings.

## Smokers' materials

**Fact** Smoking materials were the source of fire in nearly half the fire deaths in dwellings during 1996.

### ***What can you do?***

- Never leave a lit cigarette or pipe unattended - it may fall onto an armchair or carpet which will soon catch fire and start to give off dense smoke and fumes.
- Never smoke in a chair if you think you may doze off in it.
- Always keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children.

### **Bedtime routine**

**Fact** Many fires in the home start at night. Make sure you have a bedtime fire safety routine to help keep you and your family safe.

What can you do?

- Switch off and unplug all electrical appliances not designed to stay on.
- Make sure no cigarettes or pipes are still burning. Never smoke in bed.
- Before emptying ashtrays make sure the contents are cold.
- Switch off portable heaters.

### **Doors**

**Fact** A door can hold back a fire for up to 20 minutes. This will protect your escape route, but will not affect the operation of your smoke alarm.

What can you do?

- Close all doors at night.

### **Get a smoke alarm**

**Fact One** A smoke alarm will not stop fire, but it will give you those precious minutes of warning which can help you and your family get out safely.

**Fact Two** Fires discovered by smoke alarms:

- are discovered more rapidly after ignition;
- are associated with lower casualty rates;
- cause less damage.

### ***What can you do?***

- Smoke alarms cost from under £5 and are simple to install. They are widely available from DIY; hardware and electrical shops and some supermarkets. Choose an alarm which meets British Standard BS5446 Part 1 and carries the Kitemark.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to fit and position the alarm. If you have difficulties, local voluntary organisations may be able to make arrangements to have the alarm fitted for you. The instructions will also give you guidance on battery replacement and maintenance.
- Change the batteries in the smoke alarms annually - perhaps a child's birthday or other anniversary, that will help you to remember.

- Your local fire brigade is a good source of information about fitting and using smoke alarms.

## Smoke alarms for people with hearing impairments

Many people whose hearing is impaired are still able to hear a conventional smoke alarm. It is a good idea to link two or more alarms. This way smoke detected in the living room will set off another alarm in the bedroom. An electrician will be able to advise you about linking the alarms.

For people who would not be able to hear a conventional smoke alarm, there are special devices available which make use of a vibrating pad or flashing light instead of the auditory signal - the vibrating pad alarms are particularly useful for deaf-blind people. These devices are available from:

**Universal Aids Ltd** 814 Wellington Road South, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 1AA Tel: 01614809228

**SummitCP** 6 Key Hill Drive, Hockley, Birmingham B18 5NY Tel: 0121 5546946

**Arc Fire Protection** 14 Mitchell Close, Segensworth East Industrial Estate, Fareham, Hampshire PO 15 5SE Tel: 014895 82789

Further information is available from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, listed in the 'Contacts' [section of this package](#).

You may also find it useful to contact local voluntary organisations or the Social Services Department who may be able to offer advice and assistance on products specially designed to help people with disabilities.

Your local fire brigade will also be able to provide help and advice.

## Planning your escape route

**Fact** If you need to escape from your home it may be dark and in difficult conditions.

But planning your escape route is easy.

### ***What can you do?***

- Make sure that your planned escape route remains free of any obstructions and that there are no loose floor coverings that could trip you.
- Everyone in the house should be made aware of the escape route.
- Consider the options if your first escape route becomes blocked. Where are the doors and windows that could provide an alternative? If escape is possible from the first floor of your home, are there any flat roofs or porches that will help you get down to the ground?
- If you have security locks fitted to doors or windows, do people know where the keys are kept?
- If you have serious mobility difficulties you may wish to consider having your bedroom on the ground floor, if this is practical, and as near as possible to an exit. If you would need assistance to make your escape, it is vital that you have some means of summoning help by your bed, for example a buzzer, intercom or telephone.

- There are also systems available which will automatically dial out on your telephone line to summon help or send a signal to a manned control room. Details of the many emergency call/alarm systems available can be obtained from the Disabled Living Foundation who produce a booklet on the subject.

## **What to do if a fire starts**

We all try to prevent fire starting in our home. But it only takes an unguarded or careless moment for a fire to start. A couple of minutes later and your home could be filled with smoke. Smoke and fumes can kill - particularly the highly poisonous smoke from some furnishings.

You will only have a short time to get out. Use it wisely and try not to panic.

If possible, close the door of the room where the fire is and close all doors behind you as you leave. This will help delay the spread of fire and smoke.

Before opening a closed door, use the back of your hand to touch it. Don't open it if it feels warm - the fire will be on the other side.

Get everyone out as quickly as possible. Don't try to pick up valuables or possessions. Make your way out as safely as you can and try not to panic.

It will help if you have planned your escape route rather than waiting until there is a fire.

Telephone the fire brigade on 999 from a neighbour's house or a telephone box. Clearly state the address of the fire.

Never go back into the house until a fire officer has told you it is safe to do so.

## **If you are cut off by fire**

**Fact** Simple action may help save the lives of you and your family.

### ***What can you do?***

- If you are unable to use the door because of flames or smoke, close the door and use towels or sheets to block any gaps. This will help stop smoke spreading into the room.
- Try to make your way to the window.
- If the room becomes smoky, crawl along the floor where it's easier to breathe because smoke rises.
- If there are no smoke and flames on the other side of the window, open the window and try to attract the attention of others who can alert the fire brigade. Wait for the fire brigade to arrive.
- The fire brigade should arrive in a matter of minutes. If you are in immediate danger and your room is not too high from the ground, drop cushions or bedding to the ground below to break your fall from the window. If you can, get out feet first and lower yourself to the full length of your arms before dropping.

## **For further information, help and advice**

Your local council or your fire brigade will be happy to advise you on fire prevention and safety.

If you are looking for a good electrician, for example, ask friends and neighbours to introduce you to trustworthy people they know about. Elderly people especially should try to have someone they know with them when they have asked someone they don't know to call at their home. Your local Age Concern or Citizens Advice Bureau can give advice on what local voluntary groups there may be to help you, and what benefits may be due to you. Their addresses and telephone numbers can be obtained from your local telephone directory or public library.

For other sources of help, refer to the Sources of Help page.

## **Publications**

- A booklet, 'Fire safety in the home' (reference FSH1) is available in large print and Braille versions.
- An audio cassette called 'Fire safety in the home' (reference FPT1) is also available from the Home Office. This tape gives general advice on fire prevention and what to do in the event of a fire.

Other fire safety leaflets produced by the Home Office are:

- 'Electrical safety leads to fire safety' (Ref FL04)
- 'Wake up! Get a smoke alarm' (Ref FB2)
- 'How to choose and use fire extinguishers for the home' (RefFB3)

The above material is free to individuals and publicly funded organisations. A charge will be made to commercial organisations. Orders can be made by sending a fax to 0171 2732568 quoting the appropriate reference.