

...domestic fire safety

This guide is designed to help you keep your home and your family safe in the event of a fire. It is full of useful advice on what to do if you detect a fire and how to make sure everyone escapes quickly and safely.

1 Plan your escape

Does everyone in your home know what to do if there's a fire? You should plan your escape in advance and make sure everyone is aware of what to do. There's simply no time to stop and think once a fire takes hold. Within thirty seconds of your smoke alarm going off the entire floor can be filled with thick black smoke.

So make an emergency plan and talk it through with everyone in your home, especially children, older people, lodgers and child minders. The best escape route is your normal entry and exit route. But remember to take into consideration any difficulties you may have getting out in the event of a fire.

Choose a second escape route just in case the first one is blocked. This might be through a window. If it's not a ground floor window, make sure you can soften your fall with bedding or cushions. Keep both routes clear of obstructions at all times.

If there are older people or children in the household, try to plan the order you'll all escape in. So for example, if you have to go out a window an adult will need to go first to help any children down.

You should also:

- Tell everyone where keys are for doors and windows.
- Practice the plan.
- Keep your address by the phone so children can read it out to the emergency services if necessary.

2 Detecting a fire

Smoke is your biggest danger when there's a fire. If a fire starts whilst you're asleep and you don't have a smoke alarm to alert you, then you're unlikely to survive.

Smoke Alarms

Your first line of defence should always be to fit a smoke alarm. It will save your life and they're available for not much more than £5 from any DIY, electrical or hardware shop, as well as many garages and supermarkets.

Around 80% of British homes now have smoke alarms, but they're completely useless if you don't test them regularly to make sure the batteries are working.

Here's our guide to buying and fitting a smoke alarm:

- Choose one that complies with the British Standard (BS) 5446 Part 1 and preferably carries the British Standard Kitemark or PCB Horseshoe mark
- Follow the manufacturer's fitting instructions
- The best place to fit them is in hallways and landings although ideally you should fit one in every room except the kitchen and bathroom
- Make sure you can hear the alarm throughout your home, especially in the bedrooms
- Test your alarm each week using the test button
- Change the battery every year, or when the low battery warning sounds

You can also purchase other fire safety equipment, which can be useful in an emergency. However, it is important to note that fires should only be tackled in their very early stages and before you tackle any fire, make sure everyone is outside and your escape route is clear.

Fire blankets

These are ideal for kitchen fires such as burning cooking oil as they cover the fire and cut off its oxygen supply. They can also be used to wrap around someone whose clothes are on fire. Fire blankets should meet British Standard BS EN 1869:1997

Fire extinguishers

These are pressurised cylinders containing powder, foam or carbon dioxide. There are different types for different types of fire. Multi-purpose dry powder or Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) are probably the best choices for domestic use as they have the fewest dangers and are effective on many types of fire.

3 If there is a fire

Your priority is to get everyone out and dial 999. The more information you can give the Fire and Rescue Services the better, so try to tell them:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|--|
| 1. The address | 2. What is on fire | 3. Details of anyone trapped in the building |
|----------------|--------------------|--|

You should:

- Shout to wake everyone up and notify them
- Get everyone together and follow your escape plan
- Close any doors you can and only open those that you need to go through. This will help contain the fire.
- Check doors with the back of your hand before opening them. If the door is warm, don't open it – the fire is on the other side.
- Crawl along the floor if there's a lot of smoke. The air will be purer nearer the ground.
- As soon as you're out of the building dial 999
- Find somewhere safe nearby to wait for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Do not:

- Stop to investigate the fire
- Stop to collect valuables or pets
- Go back into the building for anything – even if there's someone inside. The Fire and Rescue Service will be able to find them faster and more safely than you.

4 If you live in a flat

High-rise flats are built to be fireproof. Their walls ceilings and doors will generally hold back flames and smoke. If the fire is not in your home, then you're usually safer staying put unless heat or smoke is affecting you.

Here are some guidelines to follow in the event of a fire in your building:

- Make sure everyone in your home knows about the fire and alert neighbours if you can
- Set off the fire alarm if there is one
- If you need to leave the building and there's a lot of smoke, crawl along the floor
- Don't use the lift. Go down the stairs.

Safety Check

Did you know you are three times more likely to be killed by a fire that starts during the night?

Here are some simple safety checks you can run every night to reduce the risk:

1. Close all doors. If your child must sleep with a door open, then make sure doors to the kitchen and living room are closed. This will help contain a fire should it start.
2. Check that all candles are out and place a guard in front of any open fires.
3. Check that any gas oven, hob or grill is switched off.
4. Make sure all cigarettes, cigars and pipes are extinguished.
5. Make sure there is nothing combustible next to radiators and heaters.
6. Never smoke in bed.
7. Don't run washing machines or tumble dryers overnight.
8. Don't leave televisions and electrical appliances (that aren't designed to be left on) switched on and plugged in.
9. Check that your escape routes are clear.
10. Make sure keys to doors and windows are accessible.

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