

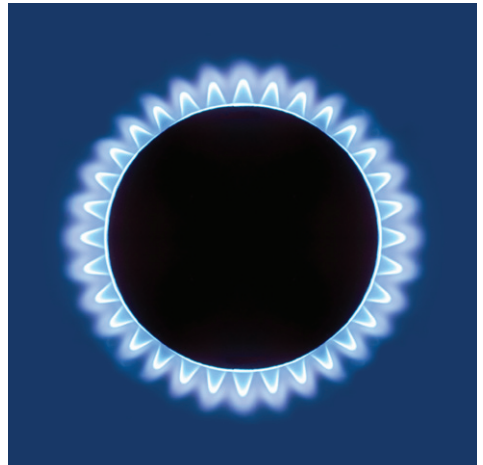
# Fire safety in the home

# Know the risks

## TOP CAUSES OF FIRES IN HOMES



**SMOKING** Page 3



**COOKING** Page 5



**CANDLES/HEATING** Pages 8 and 9



**ELECTRICS** Page 11

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# Keeping you and your home safe from fire

## AVOID FIRE RISKS



- Don't cook if you are tired or have been drinking and never leave pans unattended when cooking.
- Don't leave a lit cigarette, pipe or candle unattended and always use deep ashtrays so that they cannot roll out.

If you know someone who you think may have a higher risk of having a fire, or trouble escaping a fire, seek specialist advice from London Fire Brigade.

## FIT SMOKE ALARMS AND TEST THEM REGULARLY



Working smoke alarms are essential as they provide vital early warning and allow extra time to escape if there is a fire. They will also alert neighbours to the danger of fire. Every home should have at least one working smoke alarm per floor.

For tips about buying and testing your smoke alarm go to page 14

Most fires in the home start accidentally and the effects can be devastating. Some simple precautions can make you a lot safer.

Don't forget though, if there is a fire in your home – **get out, stay out and call 999** – don't try to tackle the fire yourself.

### BE PREPARED BY MAKING AN ESCAPE PLAN



Make sure you know what to do if you have a fire. Make an escape plan and practise it regularly. This will make sure everyone, especially those with young children, know what to do in the event of a fire.

Get tips for your plan on page 17

### DO YOU LIVE IN A PURPOSE-BUILT MAISONETTE OR BLOCK OF FLATS?



**Your plan needs to be different.**

If the fire is in your flat get out, stay out and call 999. If there is a fire elsewhere in the building you are usually safer staying in your own flat unless heat or smoke is directly affecting you or you have been told to leave by a firefighter.

Find out more on page 21

# Smoking



Never smoke in bed.



**TOP TIP**  
Put it out, right out.

The most common cause of fire death in the home is smoking. The fires caused by smoking materials (including cigarettes, roll-ups, cigars and pipe tobacco) result in more deaths than any other type of fire.

## PREVENT SMOKING RELATED FIRES

- Never smoke in bed.
- Don't smoke in a soft chair or sofa, if you think you may fall asleep.
- Take extra care when you're tired, taking prescription drugs, or if you've been drinking alcohol as this could lead to carelessness.
- Use a proper ashtray which can't tip over and is made of a material that won't burn. Make sure you have enough ashtrays to avoid any overflow. Don't leave a lit cigarette, cigar, or pipe lying around. Smoking materials can easily fall and cause a fire.
- Stub cigarettes out properly and always dispose of them carefully. Make sure smoking materials are cold before emptying ashtrays. Preferably, wet them before throwing into a bin.
- Only smoke legally manufactured cigarettes. Counterfeit cigarettes are more likely to cause fires because of the way they are made.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach, and always buy child resistant lighters.
- Never smoke if you use medical oxygen, or an air flow pressure relief mattress. If you use paraffin-based emollient creams, ask for non-flammable alternatives instead.
- Consider additional specialist equipment such as fire retardant bedding or nightwear.

# Cooking



Don't cook if you've been drinking.



Never leave cooking unattended.



More fires and fire injuries are caused by carelessness in the kitchen than anywhere else in the home.

## PREVENT COOKING FIRES

- Avoid leaving cooking unattended. If you have to leave the kitchen whilst cooking, it's safer to take pans off the heat and turn off the hob and/or grill.
- Don't cook if you are tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that might make you drowsy.
- Loose clothing can easily catch fire – take care not to lean over a hot hob and keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob.
- Be careful to keep the oven, hob, cooker hood and grill clean, and in good working order. A build up of fat and grease can ignite and cause a fire.
- Use spark devices to light gas cookers. They are much safer than matches or lighters as they don't have a naked flame.
- Double check the cooker and hob are turned off when you've finished cooking.
- Check toasters are clean and placed away from anything that can catch fire.
- Never put anything metal in the microwave.
- Never use a barbeque indoors or on a balcony. Any fuel that burns or smoulders can cause carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Supervise children and pets in the kitchen at all times. Keep matches and saucepan handles out of their reach.



This is what happens when you pour just a small amount of water onto a pan of hot oil that has caught fire. In an instant the blaze explodes into a fireball.

### IF A PAN CATCHES FIRE

- Don't tackle the fire yourself and don't attempt to move the pan.
- Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so.
- Never throw water over a fire as it could create a fireball.
- Leave the room, close the door, shout a warning to others and call the fire brigade by dialling 999.

### DEEP FAT FRYING

- Take care when cooking with hot oil – it can easily overheat and catch fire.
- Never fill a pan more than one third full of fat or oil.
- Make sure food is dry before putting it in hot oil.
- If the oil starts to smoke, it's too hot. Turn off the heat and leave it to cool.
- Use an electronic deep fat fryer if possible – they have thermostats to control the temperature.

# Candles and naked flames



Candles, incense and oil burners are one of the biggest causes of fire within homes. Keep an eye on these items to keep you and your home safe.

## **ALWAYS FOLLOW THIS ADVICE**

- These items should be held firmly in a heat resistant holder, on a stable surface where they won't be knocked over.
- Tea lights can melt through plastic surfaces like a TV or bath.
- Keep these items away from materials that may catch fire such as curtains, furniture, clothes and hair.
- To avoid accidents, keep these items away from children and pets.
- Put these items out when you leave the room and especially before bed.

# Portable heaters and open fires



Keep heaters away from clothes, curtains and furniture.



Use a fire guard to protect against flying sparks and hot embers.

It's important to stay safe while heating your home – each year several fires and deaths are caused by heaters being placed too close to flammable materials. You should also be aware of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. See page 29.

## PORTABLE HEATERS AND FIRES

- Secure heaters against a wall to stop them falling over, or fit wall-mounted heaters.
- Keep heaters well away from clothes, curtains and furniture.
- Always sit at least one metre away from a heater as it could set light to your clothes or chair, especially if you fall asleep.
- Always turn off your heater and allow it to cool before moving it.
- Change gas heater cylinders in the open air, or open windows and doors if you have to change them indoors.
- Store spare cylinders upright and outside whenever possible. Never store them in basements, under stairs or in cupboards containing electric meters or equipment.
- If you are using gas, paraffin, or bioethanol (bio) fuel heaters make sure the area is well ventilated.
- When using bio-fuel always follow the manufacturer's guidelines and instructions. Keep containers stored safely away from the burner.
- Fireboxes and containers should always be placed on a stable surface.
- Never add fuel to a burning fire, or attempt to refill a firebox fuel container that is still hot.

## OPEN FIRES AND LOG BURNERS

- Keep chimneys and flues clean and well maintained. Always have your chimney swept by a specialist (at least once a year for coal, twice if burning logs).
- Make sure you use a fire guard to protect against flying sparks and hot embers.
- Before you go to bed, make sure fires are under control and guarded, or better still put out.
- Store logs away from burners. Radiated heat can cause them to burn.

# Electrics



Don't overload plug sockets. Keep to one plug per socket.

**5 + 5 + 3 = 13**  
AMP AMP AMP AMP

**TOP TIP:** Know the limit!

**1** British Standards safety mark.

**2** European safety mark.

Electrical fires are common, but many can be easily avoided by following some simple actions.

## PREVENT ELECTRICAL FIRES

- Don't use imitation electrical chargers as they may be unsafe. It is best to use the charger that came with your phone or mobile device.
- Make sure electrical appliances have a British or European safety mark when you buy them.
- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order.
- Unplugging appliances and chargers when you are not using them or when you go to bed helps reduce the risk of fire.
- Hair straighteners can get extremely hot. Always switch them off and leave them to cool on a heatproof surface.
- For plugs that do not come fitted to the appliance, always check that you're using the right fuse. For example – lamps, televisions, videos, computers, blenders, fridges, freezers and power drills generally need 3 amp fuses but washing machines, dishwashers, microwaves, kettles, toasters and irons generally need 13 amp fuses.
- Keep to one plug per socket. High powered appliances, such as washing machines, should have a single socket to themselves.
- If you have to use an adaptor, use a fused 'in line' type. The adaptor or extension lead will have a limit of how much power it can safely provide so be careful not to overload it by using extra plug-in adaptors or high current appliances e.g. electric heaters.
- If using a cable drum extension lead, it should be completely unwound to avoid overheating.
- Remember that scorch marks, flickering lights, hot plugs and sockets, fuses that blow or circuit-breakers that trip for no obvious reasons could be signs of loose or dangerous wiring. If in doubt ask a qualified electrician to check your wiring.

## PRODUCT RECALLS

The Electrical Safety Council recall electrical products for safety reasons. A list of recalled products is available on the London Fire Brigade website: [www.london-fire.gov.uk/product-recalls.asp](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/product-recalls.asp)

If you are concerned about the safety of a product that does not appear on the Electrical Safety Council recall list, stop using it and make your concern known to the retailer, manufacturer or, if not known, your local Trading Standards office.

## USING AN ELECTRIC BLANKET

- Store electric blankets flat, rolled up or loosely folded to prevent damaging the internal wiring.
- Unplug blankets before you get into bed, unless it has a thermostat control for safe all-night use.
- Never use an electric blanket if you have an air flow pressure relief mattress, or use paraffin based emollient creams. Ask for non-flammable alternatives instead.
- Do not buy second-hand electric blankets.
- Check regularly for wear and tear and replace your electric blanket every 10 years.

## REMEMBER

If you're having trouble paying your energy bills don't use candles and naked flames as a substitute for heating and lighting. Your electric or gas supplier may be able to provide you with free or subsidised energy efficiency measures, such as insulation, or a discount on your bill. Contact them to find out if you qualify.



# Smoke alarms



Working smoke alarms are essential as they provide vital early warning and allow extra time to escape if there is a fire. They can also alert neighbours to the danger of fire. Every home should have at least one working smoke alarm per floor.

## CHOOSING AND FITTING YOUR SMOKE ALARM

**Smoke alarms are affordable and easy to install. They are available from DIY and electrical shops, and most high street supermarkets.**

- Make sure any alarm you buy is marked with a current British Standards or European (CE) safety mark, which shows the alarm is approved and safe.
  - Fit smoke alarms on every level of your home on a ceiling or high up on a wall, if the instructions state it is suitable for wall mounting. Make sure you cover every room containing a fire risk.
  - If you have difficulty leaving the house quickly, get ahead by fitting extra smoke alarms. Linked alarms will alert you no matter where you are in your home.
  - Fit your smoke alarm away from kitchens or bathrooms as steam can damage the alarm, or set it off by mistake.
  - Consider installing a smoke alarm with a 10 year battery. They are slightly more expensive, but you save on the cost of replacing batteries.
- If you need further advice on fitting your alarm, contact London Fire Brigade.
  - Strobe light and vibrating-pad alarms are available for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Contact: Action on Hearing Loss Information Line on 0808 808 0123 or textphone 0808 808 9000.



## MAKING SURE YOUR SMOKE ALARM WORKS

**Just fitting a smoke alarm isn't enough, once you have one it is vital that you test it regularly to make sure it is working.**

- Test your smoke alarm every week.
- Change the battery when the low battery warning operates.
- Never disconnect or take the batteries out of your alarm if it goes off by mistake.
- Do not try to remove batteries in 10 year smoke alarms as they cannot be removed or replaced and doing so will damage the smoke alarm. If your 10 year smoke alarm stops working, you will need to replace it.

## OTHER TYPES OF DETECTION

- Mains-powered alarms, which are powered by your home power supply should be installed by a qualified electrician. Some battery/mains detectors can be linked, so that when one alarm detects a fire they all go off together.
- Where a Telecare system is fitted, consider linking it to smoke alarms.
- In some circumstances automatic fire suppression systems such as sprinklers may be needed. If in doubt, seek specialist advice.
- As well as fitting a smoke alarm you may also consider fitting a heat detector. These are designed for use in the kitchen and will go off when a certain temperature is met or when the temperature in a room rises at a certain rate. They are not meant to replace smoke alarms, but using a combination of the two can provide maximum protection against the dangers of fire in the home. You may need additional alarms to cover all areas of risk.

## DISPOSAL OF SMOKE ALARMS

Smoke alarms fall under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations and so should not be thrown out in general rubbish.

If you need to dispose of an old smoke alarm:

- Take it to your local rubbish/recycling centre.
- Arrange for your local council to collect the equipment. Some local authorities provide a free collection service and others charge a fee.
- Arrange for an electrical retailer delivering new equipment to take away the old alarm.

# Escape



Make an escape plan and practise it regularly to make sure everyone knows how to escape.

If you live in a purpose-built maisonettes or block of flats of any height, your escape plan needs to be different from those in other types of home. See page 21 for specific advice.

## MAKING AN ESCAPE PLAN

- The best route is the normal way in and out of your home.
- Plan for a second route in case the first one is blocked.
- Keep door and window keys where everyone you live with can find them.
- If anyone in the home is slow to react or has mobility issues, have an escape plan that is tailored to suit their need and practice it regularly. For example, ensure mobility aids and methods of calling for help are close to hand in case they are needed to assist with an escape.
- Make sure the way in and out of your home is kept clear of anything that may slow down your escape.
- Review your plan if your circumstances change. If you need support or advice with this, contact London Fire Brigade.
- Keep valuable documents in a metal fire-proof box so that you know they will be safe if there is a fire.



Make sure everyone that lives in the house knows the escape plan.

## WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A FIRE IN YOUR HOME

- If your smoke alarm goes off, never assume it is a false alarm.
- Shout 'FIRE' to alert others in the home.
- Don't waste time investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables.
- Don't put yourself and others in danger by tackling fires yourself.
- Keep calm and get out, closing doors behind you to slow down the spread of fire and smoke.
- Before you open a door check if it's warm with the back of your hand. If it is, don't open it, there may be a fire on the other side.
- If there's smoke, keep low where the air is clearer.
- Call 999 as soon as it is safe to do so – 999 calls are free.
- Never go back into the building once you are safely outside.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR ESCAPE IS BLOCKED



- If you can't get out, find a safe room away from fire, ideally one with a window that opens and access to a phone.
- Close the door and put bedding or any soft materials around the bottom of the door to block the smoke, then open the window and call "HELP, FIRE". If you have a phone with you, call 999 and ask for the fire brigade. Be ready to describe where you are and the quickest way to reach you.
- If you're on the ground or first floor, you may be able to escape through a window. Use soft materials to cushion your fall and lower yourself down carefully. Don't jump.

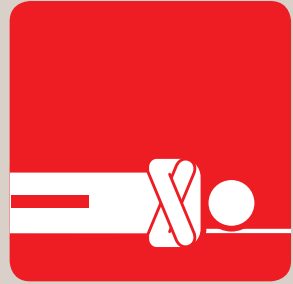
## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CLOTHES CATCH FIRE



**STOP**



**DROP**



**AND ROLL**

- Don't run around, you'll make the flames worse.
- Lie down and roll around. It makes it harder for the flames to spread.  
**Remember – stop, drop and roll!**
- If you are with someone whose clothes have caught fire, get them to stop, drop and roll then smother the flames with a heavy material, like a coat or blanket.

# Extra advice for purpose-built maisonettes or blocks of flats





Follow this advice if you live in a purpose-built maisonette or block of flats, of any height, with shared communal corridors, external walkways, staircases or entrances.

## IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE

**If there is a fire or smoke inside your maisonette or flat and your escape route is clear:**

- Get everyone out, close the door and walk as calmly as possible out of the building.
- Do not use the lift.
- Call 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on.

**If there is a fire or smoke inside your maisonette or flat but your escape route is NOT clear:**

- It may be safer to stay in your maisonette or flat until the fire brigade arrives.
- Close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke. Go to a window, call for help. Dial 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on.

**If there is a fire in another part of the building but not inside your maisonette or flat:**

- Purpose-built maisonettes or blocks of flats are built to give you some protection from fire. Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes.
- If you are in your flat, you are usually safer staying there unless heat or smoke is affecting you. Stay put and call 999. Tell the fire brigade where you are and the best way to reach you.
- If you are within the communal areas of the building, leave and call 999.



## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING AS PART OF YOUR PLAN:

- Fit smoke alarms on every level of your home on a ceiling or high up on a wall, if the instructions state it is suitable for wall mounting. Make sure you cover every room containing a fire risk.
- Know the fire escape plan for your building, talk to your housing officer or landlord if you are unsure.
- Make sure everyone you live with knows how to raise the alarm in the event of a fire.
- Communal staircases, corridors and balconies should be kept clear of anything that may block your escape such as prams, bicycles or mobility scooters.
- Remember – household rubbish should always be taken to the refuse area immediately and not left in communal areas.
- It is easy to get confused if it is dark or smoky so it's important to know your route out of the building using the exit stairs. Count the number of doors you need to go through or use familiar objects to guide you to help with your escape in the event of a fire.
- Your home may be provided with an alternative escape route. Always make sure it is kept clear and you can access it at any time.

# Rented accommodation



If you live in rented accommodation, your landlord has certain safety responsibilities and should tell you everything related to the building which may affect your safety. As a tenant, you also have responsibilities to help reduce the likelihood of a fire happening.



You are personally responsible for making sure that any smoke alarms within your property are tested and working.

## **YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES**

- You should follow advice in this booklet on how to prevent fires in the home.
- You are personally responsible for making sure that any smoke alarms within your property are tested and working.
- Make sure your fire doors are maintained and always close them before you go to bed at night.

## YOUR LANDLORD'S RESPONSIBILITIES

- Make sure all gas and electric appliances (that they supply) are safe and in good working order.
- Show you safety certificates so you know when gas and electrical appliances (that they supply) were last checked.
- Ensure gas appliances are checked by a Gas Safe registered gas fitter every year. Carbon monoxide can be a hazard – for further advice see page 29.
- Make sure that furniture and furnishings (that they supply) are fire resistant and meet safety regulations.
- Provide you with fire-resisting and self-closing front doors, emergency lighting and a fire alarm.
- Ensure that escape routes are clearly marked and that there are enough signs to make sure that anyone in the building will know what to do if there is a fire.
- Ensure that parking is controlled around your building to allow easy access for fire engines.
- Ensure that clear instructions are placed in and around lifts to explain what to do if there is a fire.
- Ensure that rubbish stores have their doors closed at all times and make sure they are locked so passers-by can't get into them.
- Ensure that shared stairs, corridors and landings are free of any clutter.
- Supply you with details of any changes to the fire plan after any building works.

### **If you live in maisonettes or flats of any height, your landlord should also:**

- Supply you with a fire safety strategy and plan and advise on how to access the fire risk assessment for your building including the fire procedures and evacuation information.

# Bedtime check



Close inside doors at night.



Check your cooker is turned off.



Turn off and unplug electrical appliances.

Many fire deaths happen at night, when most people are sleeping. Working smoke alarms should wake you if a fire does break out, but you can further reduce your risk by carrying out some simple checks before you go to bed.

## BEDTIME CHECK

- Close inside doors at night to stop a fire from spreading. A closed door will hold back fire and stop it from spreading, which gives you and your family more time to escape.
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances unless they are designed to be left on – like your freezer. Do not leave your mobile phone or tablet charging overnight.
- Check your cooker is turned off.
- Don't leave the washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher on.
- Turn heaters off, rake out fires and put a fire guard in place.
- Put candles, incense sticks and oil burners out and never leave them burning when you are asleep.
- Make sure cigarettes are completely out. It's best to wet them to be sure. Never smoke in bed.
- Make sure escape routes are clear of anything that may slow you down.
- Keep door and window keys where everyone you live with can find them.
- If you or anyone else in the home has mobility issues, ensure mobility aids and methods of calling for help are close to hand in case they are needed to assist with an escape.

# Carbon monoxide



Make sure appliances are installed and maintained by a professional.



Carbon monoxide (CO) is a silent killer, with around 50 deaths and hundreds of injuries recorded nationally every year.

## WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?

Carbon monoxide is a highly poisonous substance produced by the incomplete burning of gas and Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG). This happens when gas appliances such as cookers, heaters and gas fires have

been incorrectly fitted, badly repaired or poorly maintained. It can also occur if flues, chimneys or vents are blocked. Oil and solid fuels such as coal, wood, petrol and oil can also produce carbon monoxide.

## HOW TO PREVENT CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

- Fit a CO alarm which are available at a low cost. They can be bought at DIY stores and some supermarkets, or directly from energy suppliers. Follow manufacturers instructions on positioning, testing and replacing the alarm.
- Make sure appliances are installed and maintained by a professional.
- Ensure your home has enough ventilation and airbricks are not blocked.
- Keep chimney flues free from blockages.
- Never use a purpose-built or disposable barbeque indoors.
- When you buy a carbon monoxide alarm, make sure it meets current British Standards or European safety standards. Look for alarms marked with the EN 50291 standard. This may be written as BS EN 50291 or EN 50291 and with the 'CE' mark.



Fit a CO alarm for protection against carbon monoxide poisoning.

## CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING SYMPTOMS

Carbon monoxide poisoning can kill quickly. You cannot taste, see or smell CO but the symptoms include:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Breathlessness
- Collapse
- Loss of consciousness

## WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

- Open the windows to ventilate.
- Evacuate everyone outside to fresh air.
- Contact your doctor or call for an ambulance.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please visit the Gas Safe website or London Fire Brigade website at:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/) or [www.london-fire.gov.uk/carbon-monoxide-poisoning](http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/carbon-monoxide-poisoning)





[london-fire.gov.uk](http://london-fire.gov.uk)



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