

---

# Fire safety

for people with sight, hearing  
or mobility difficulties



---

**PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM FIRE**

# Essential information about fire safety

**With a little planning, almost all house fires can be prevented.**

**If you have difficulties with sight, hearing or mobility, or perhaps they are just not as good as they used to be, read this leaflet to find out about fire safety.**

---

The good news is that there are solutions to the problems you may face. Read this leaflet to find out about affordable special equipment that will alert you to the early stages of fire in your home. You can also find out about what you should do to escape from fire even if you can't get out of the building.

## **Working smoke alarms save lives!**



"I woke up with a terrible fright as the smoke alarm went off", says Vera Bradley, age 82.

"I got out of bed and went straight outside in my dressing gown. A minute later my bedroom was in flames. The fireman told me I would have been dead without that alarm."

# SMOKE ALARMS

---

**A smoke alarm is a warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire. This gives you vital extra time to escape which is especially important if you have trouble moving around.**

- Smoke alarms cost from as little as £5 and you can get them from supermarkets and high-street stores.



- Fit at least one on each floor of your home, ideally on the hallway or landing ceilings.
- Don't put a smoke alarm in the kitchen where it can be set off accidentally.



- You can buy smoke alarms fitted with a 'hush button' so you can silence the alarm if it goes off by mistake.

- Once a week test the battery. You can get certain smoke alarms which have a test switch at a low level if you can't reach the detector easily.
- Press the test button until the alarm sounds.
- Once a year change the battery (unless it's a 10-year alarm).
- Twice a year, open the case and gently vacuum the inside to remove dust from the sensors. If it doesn't open, vacuum through the holes.
- After 10 years it's best to replace your alarm with a whole new unit.

## Power supply

**A lot of people forget to check the batteries in their smoke alarms, so the best choice of power supply is one that lasts longest.**

- **Standard battery alarms**

are the most basic alarms and the cheapest available. But batteries will need to be tested every week and replaced once a year.



---

- **Alarms with 10-year batteries**

are slightly more expensive but you will save on the cost of replacement batteries.



---

- **Mains-powered alarms**

are powered by the household's mains supply and solve the problem of checking the battery. They need to be installed by a qualified electrician. Prices start at about £15, but you need to add the cost of fitting them. It's worthwhile thinking about this option if you are having other electrical work done in your home.



***It's vital to maintain your smoke alarms.***

## Do you have hearing problems?

### ● **Strobe light and vibrating-pad alarms**

If you are deaf, a little hard of hearing or simply a heavy sleeper, you should consider this type of smoke alarm system. These smoke alarms can be fitted with a vibrating pad and flashing strobe light.

You should put the pad under your mattress or pillow to wake you up at night if there is a fire. When smoke is detected, the alarm will sound and set off the light and pad. This will wake you up instantly. Battery-operated systems cost from £100.



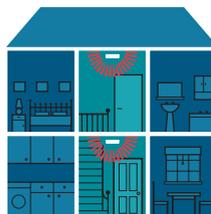
*The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) produce a factsheet on smoke-alarm systems for the deaf and hard of hearing.*

**Contact the RNID Information line on 0808 808 0123 or visit [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)**

### ● **Linked alarms**

If you are concerned that you will not hear your smoke alarm because you live in a large house or one with more than one floor, you may want to consider asking a qualified electrician to install linked alarms.

Interconnected alarms can be installed so that when one detects a fire, they will all sound. This will make sure that you are woken up before the fire has spread closer to you.



## Help with installation

- If it is difficult for you to fit your alarm, contact your local Fire and Rescue Service (fire station). You will find this phone number in the phone book – don't call 999. They will be happy to advise you or help you fit it, and to answer any other questions you may have on fire safety in the home.



### Peace of mind



“I always knew I should install a smoke alarm”, says Arthur Humphries, age 79. “But at my age I couldn't put the thing up on the ceiling. It was starting to play on my mind a lot, especially at night. Then one day my daughter mentioned that the local council or Fire and Rescue Service might be able to help.”

“Within a week I had a visit and I can't tell you how much better I feel now.”

## BUZZERS

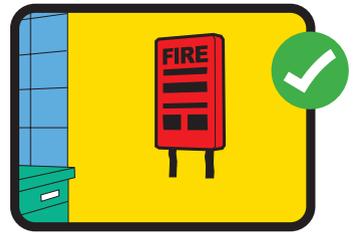
- If you have trouble moving around, you need a way of calling for help quickly. Consider fitting a buzzer, an intercom system or a phone which is fitted with an automatic dial-out system which calls for help if your smoke alarm goes off.

# KITCHEN SAFETY

---

- Keep electrical leads and items which can catch fire easily, such as tea towels, oven gloves and loose clothing, away from the cooker and toaster.
  - Keep the oven, toaster, hob and grill clean. A build-up of crumbs, fat and grease can easily catch fire.
  - Keep electrical leads and appliances away from water.
- 

- Why not keep a fire blanket in the kitchen? You can use it to wrap around someone whose clothes have caught fire or to smother a small fire. Ask your local Fire and Rescue Service about the best one to buy.



*Don't leave cooking unattended.*

***Fire starts when your attention stops.***

- If you deep-fry food, dry it before you put it in the hot oil. If the oil starts to smoke, turn off the heat and leave the pan to cool.
- 

- Never fill chip pans more than one-third full of oil.
- 

- Don't use matches or lighters to light gas cookers. Spark devices are safer.

- Make sure saucepan handles don't stick out from the hob.



## What if a pan catches fire?

You should only ever tackle a pan fire if it's in its early stages and you're completely sure you can put it out and stay safe.

- Turn off the heat if it's safe to do so. Don't move the pan.

- Run a cloth under the tap, wring it out carefully, and cover the flaming pan. If you have a fire blanket, put it over the pan.



- Never throw water over the pan.



---

IF THERE'S A FIRE... **Get Out  
Stay Out  
and call  
999**



***Don't take risks.***

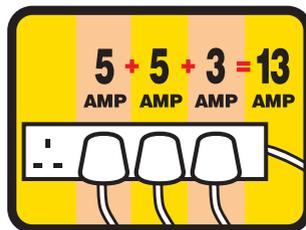
*There is no such thing as a safe fire. It's better for you to prevent fire than to fight it.*

***Tackling fire is a job best left to professional firefighters.***

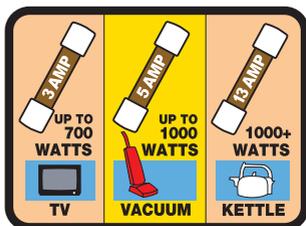
# ELECTRICS

## Plugs and cables

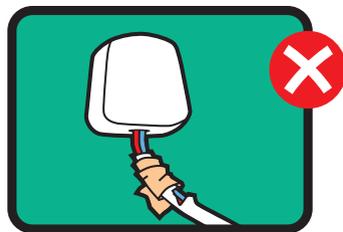
- Check the maximum amps that the fuse in the plug can handle.



- If you have to use an adaptor, use one which has a fuse and keep the total output to no more than 13 amps. Watch out! A single kettle uses 13 amps alone.



- Don't put cables under carpets or mats.
- Check for signs of loose wiring and faulty plugs or sockets, such as scorch marks or flickering lights.
- Replace any worn or taped-up cables and leads. But never repair cables yourself – always consult a qualified electrician.



- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order, and have them serviced regularly. This is especially important for washing machines and tumble dryers that may be left on overnight.
- Never buy an electrical appliance without making sure it is safe to use. New appliances should have the British or European safety mark on it. If the appliance is second-hand, always have it checked by a qualified electrician before you use it.

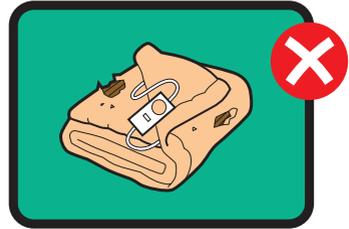
- Don't overload sockets – use one plug in each socket.



---

## Electric blankets

- Don't leave blankets folded. Store them flat or rolled up to protect the internal wiring.
- Check them regularly for wear and tear.



- Only leave a blanket switched on all night if it has thermostatic controls for safe all-night use. Otherwise, unplug it before you get into bed.

- Don't get blankets wet.
- If the blanket does get wet, don't use it until it is completely dry. Never switch it on to dry it.



- Replace blankets every 10 years. Never buy second-hand blankets and look out for the British or European safety mark.



## Portable heaters

- Always position heaters so they are backed up against a wall, facing into the room. If possible, secure them to the wall to stop them falling over.
- Put heaters at least one metre (three feet) away from curtains or furnishings, and never use them for drying clothes.



## Lights

- Don't position lights and bulbs near curtains and other fabrics.



***Check your furniture has the permanent fire-resistant label.***



## Dealing with electrical fires

**If an electrical fire is small and hasn't spread, you may be able to tackle it yourself but it is vital you do things right.**

- Pull the plug out or switch off the power at the fuse box. This may stop the fire immediately.
- Smother the fire with a fire blanket.
- Never use water on an electrical fire. Remember, if you are in doubt get out and call 999!

# CIGARETTES

---

**Every three days someone dies from a fire caused by a cigarette.**

- Take extra care smoking if you are drowsy, are taking prescription drugs or have been drinking. It's too easy to fall asleep and not notice that a cigarette is still burning.
- Don't smoke in bed. It's too easy to fall asleep and set the bed on fire.



***It's hotter than you think*** – cigarettes can burn at temperatures of over 700°C.

- 
- Always use proper ashtrays.
  - Make sure that when you put out a cigarette, it is really out.



- 
- Take responsibility and keep matches and lighters out of the reach and sight of children.



# CANDLES

Treat lighted candles as you would any other flame.

- Don't leave them unattended.
- Put them out completely at night.



- Keep candles away from anything that can catch fire, for example, furnishings, fabrics and curtains.



- Candles and tea lights can melt plastic surfaces like the tops of televisions and bathtubs.

Make sure you always place them on a heat-resistant surface. Put them in a flameproof holder that can't be knocked over.



***It only takes a moment's distraction for a fire to start – keep candles out of the reach and sight of children and away from pets.***

## BE PREPARED – plan ahead

---

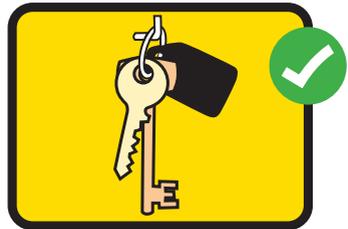
- Spend a few minutes thinking about how you'd get out if there was a fire. What would you do if your main escape route was blocked? Would everyone know what to do? Would you be able to escape, or do you need a 'safe room' to wait in until help arrives? Make sure you know the basic procedure for surviving a fire.
- It might be an idea to pin up the basic plan on the wall, especially if people often drop in or come to stay.



---

## Know where the keys are kept

- You need to be able to find the door or window keys in a hurry.
- Agree with everyone you live with where they are going to be kept, and keep them there.



---

## Keep your escape route clear

- The best escape route is your normal way in and out of your home.
- Choose a second escape route in case the first one is blocked by fire.
- Keep both routes clear of obstructions.



## What to do if a fire starts

- If there is smoke, keep low where the air is clearer.
- Try and keep calm. Get everyone out as quickly as possible – don't waste time investigating or rescuing valuables.
- Only open doors to escape because keeping doors shut slows the spread of fire.
- Test each door you need to go through with the back of your hand before opening it. Do not open the door if the temperature is very hot as the fire will be the other side of it.



---

## What to do if your clothes catch fire

- Don't run around.
- Lie down and roll around.
- Smother the flames with a heavy material, like a coat, blanket or a fire blanket if there is one near.



**STOP!**



**DROP!**



**ROLL!**

- Call 999 as soon as you are clear of the building. Use a mobile phone, phonebox or neighbour's phone. Don't go back inside for any reason. Wait outside for the Fire and Rescue Service.

# What to do if escape routes are blocked

- If you can't escape, choose a 'safe room' to wait in until help arrives. This room should ideally have a phone in and a window that opens.



- If you can't open the window, break the glass in the bottom corner. Make jagged edges safe with a towel or blanket.



- If you're on the ground or first floor, go out of a window. Use bedding to cushion your fall and lower yourself. Don't jump!



- If you can't get out, put bedding or clothing round the door to block smoke.



- Call the Fire and Rescue Service if you have a phone, or try to alert your neighbours or passers-by to do so on your behalf.



# Home check

You can prevent most fires in your home. Use the home check list below to think about fire safety where you are living. Keep it handy as a reminder of the basics. It may seem like common sense, but it could save your life. The person renting the property is normally legally responsible for it. It is your life, so make sure your living space is safe from the risk of fire.

---



***The basics – don't wait until later!***  
*If you do spot a problem, put it right now.*

## Smoke alarms

A smoke alarm has been fitted on every floor.

Smoke alarm batteries have been tested in the last week.

Smoke alarm batteries have been replaced in the last year.

## Electrics

There is no more than one plug in each wall socket.

If an adaptor is used, appliances running off it use no more than 13 amps in total.

Fuses are the correct rating for each appliance.

There are no loose or taped-up cables and leads.

There are no plugs or sockets with scorch marks.

---



## Kitchen essentials

The cooker, toaster and grill pans are clean.

Electrical leads or flammable materials, such as tea towels or cloths, are away from the cooker and toaster.

## General risks

Lights are not near curtains or other materials that can catch fire easily.

Any matches or lighters are out of children's reach and sight.

All upholstered furniture in the property has a fire-resistant label.



### **Last thing at night.**

*You are far more likely to be killed or injured in a fire during the night, so get used to checking your home is safe before you go to bed.*

- Switch off and unplug electrical appliances you are not using unless they are designed to stay on, such as the freezer or video recorder for example.
- Check the cooker is turned off.
- Don't leave the washing machine on.
- Turn heaters off and put up fire guards.
- Put out candles and cigarettes properly.
- Close inside doors as they would slow the spread of a fire.

---

## Regular checks and maintenance

**Every week:** - test your smoke alarm battery.

**Every year:** - change your smoke alarm battery;  
- service your boiler; and  
- service any major electrical appliances.

**Every 10 years:** - replace your smoke alarm.

# FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

---

**Your local Fire and Rescue Service can give you advice on fire safety equipment and fitting smoke alarms.**

They can also send someone round to check your home for fire risks. Local voluntary groups, such as Age Concern and the Citizens Advice, can also give you advice on basic home safety. You can also contact the following organisations to find out more about fire safety for yourself or on behalf of someone with sight, hearing or mobility difficulties.

## **Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)**

Phone: 020 7289 6111

Website: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

## **National Federation of the Blind of the UK**

Phone: 01924 291313

Website: [www.nfbuk.org](http://www.nfbuk.org)

## **Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)**

Phone: 020 7250 3222

Website: [www.radar.org.uk](http://www.radar.org.uk)

## **Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)**

Phone: 0207 388 1266

Website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## **Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)**

Phone: 020 7296 8000

Textphone: 020 7296 8001 (minicom)

Website: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

## **Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)**

Phone: 0121 248 2000

Website: [www.rospa.co.uk](http://www.rospa.co.uk)

## **The Residential Sprinkler Association**

Phone: 0118 971 2322

Website: [www.firesprinklers.org.uk](http://www.firesprinklers.org.uk)

## **Help the Aged**

Phone: 020 7278 1114

Website: [www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)

## **Shelter**

Phone: 0808 800 4444  
(free 24hr helpline)

Website: [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

## **Fire Safety website**

Phone: Contact your local Fire and Rescue Service. You will find this phone number in the phone book – don't call 999.

Website: [www.firekills.gov.uk](http://www.firekills.gov.uk)



## GET SMART!

Information that could save your life.

## GET EQUIPPED!

Investing in your own safety.

## GET OUT!

Make a plan. Be prepared.

This is one of a series of leaflets in the 'Get Smart! Get Equipped! Get Out!' fire safety range available from your local Fire and Rescue Service. Other leaflets in the series provide advice on fire safety equipment, fire safety for parents and children, and extra information for those with eyesight problems or problems getting around.

Translations and alternative formats are also available.

Published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.  
©Crown copyright 2004. Printed in the UK, March 2004,  
on material containing 75% post-consumer waste  
and 25% ECF pulp (03DOCF01123)

Product code: Impaired Sight/Mobility 04



**For further information visit our website at: [www.firekills.gov.uk](http://www.firekills.gov.uk)**