

Home Safety Guide & Evaluation



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Home Safety Evaluation

Read the following statements and answer the questions provided. Place a check mark (✓) in the box of all questions answered "Yes." Place an "X" in the box for all questions that you answer "No." All boxes with an "X" represent opportunities to improve safety in your home.

1 ALL AREAS OF THE HOME

Check all electrical and telephone cords; rugs, runners and mats; smoke/carbon monoxide detectors; electrical outlets and switches; light bulbs; space heaters; wood-burning stoves; your emergency exit plan; first aid kits, and utility shut-offs.

1.A Cords

Cords stretched across walkways may cause someone to trip.

- Is furniture arranged so that outlets are available for lamps and appliances without the use of extension cords?*
- If extension cords are used, are they placed against a wall where people cannot trip over them?*
- Are phone cords off the floor and out of the areas where people walk?*

Furniture resting on cords can damage them, creating fire and shock hazards. Electric cords, which run under carpeting, may cause a fire.

- Are all cords kept out from under furniture or carpeting?*

Damaged cords may cause shock or fire. Nails or staples can also damage cords and present fire and shock hazards.

- Are cords free of nails and staples?*
- Are cords free from damage?*

Overloaded extension cords may cause fires.

- Are all extension cords rated for the power requirements of items plugged into them?*

1.B Rugs, Runners and Mats

Thousands of people are treated in emergency rooms every year for injuries that resulted from tripping over rugs and runners. Falls are also the most common cause of fatal injury for older people. Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs and runners to keep them from sliding. Purchase rugs with slip-resistant backing.

- Do all rugs and runners have anti-slip backing so they will not slide?*
- Is the backing of rugs and runners periodically checked to ensure good condition?*

NOTE: Over time, tape adhesive can wear away. Rugs with slip-resistant backing also become less effective as they are washed.

1.C Telephone Area

In case of emergency, telephone numbers for the Police, Fire Department and local Poison Control Center, along with a neighbor's number, should be readily available.

- Are emergency numbers in large print and placed near the phone where they can be seen easily?*

- Do you have access to a telephone if you fall or experience some other emergency that prevents you from standing and reaching a wall phone?*

1.D Smoke Detectors / Fire Extinguishers

At least one smoke detector should be placed on every floor of your home. Read the instructions that come with your smoke detector for advice on the best place to install it. Replace any smoke detector that cannot be repaired.

- Do you have properly working smoke detectors?*
- Are detectors placed near bedrooms, either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall?*
- Are smoke detectors properly located away from air vents?*

Many home fire injuries and deaths are caused by smoke and toxic gases rather than by the fire itself. Smoke detectors provide an early warning and can wake you in the event of a fire.

- Do you check the batteries of all smoke detectors often (at least every six months, or each time you move your clocks forward and back)?*
- Do you vacuum the grillwork of your smoke detector to ensure it is kept clean?*

It is suggested that a fire extinguisher be placed on each floor of your home. A multi-purpose, dry chemical class ABC fire extinguisher is a good choice for general home use.

- Is each floor of your home equipped with a multi-purpose fire extinguisher?*
- Are extinguishers mounted on a bracket on the wall or near an exit so that anyone using it can escape from the room if a fire spreads?*
- Do all adult occupants of the home know when and how to use the extinguisher?*

1.E Electrical Outlets and Switches

Unusually warm outlets or switches may cause injury. Have an electrician check the wiring as soon as possible if you notice any cords that feel warm or hot.

- Are all outlets and switches cool to the touch?*

Exposed wiring presents a shock hazard.

- Do all outlets and switches have cover plates, so that no wiring is exposed?*

1.F Light Bulbs

A bulb of too high wattage or the wrong type may lead to fire through overheating. Ceiling fixtures, recessed lights and "hooded" lamps will trap heat. Ensure all bulbs are the correct wattage for the fixture.

- Are light bulbs the appropriate size and type for the lamp or fixture?*

1.G Space Heaters

The grounding feature provided by a 3-prong receptacle or an adapter for a 2-prong receptacle is a safety feature designed to lessen the risk of shock. Never compromise the ground feature.

- Are heaters and other appliances that come with a 3-prong plug being used in a 3-prong outlet or with a properly attached adapter?*
- If you do not have a 3-hole outlet, are you using an adapter to connect the heater's 3-prong plug and is the adapter ground wire/tab attached to the outlet?*

Heaters can cause fires or serious burns if they are knocked over. Relocate heaters away from passageways and flammable materials such as curtains, rugs, furniture, etc.

- Are small stoves and heaters placed where they cannot be knocked over, and away from furnishings and flammable materials, such as curtains or rugs?*

Unvented fuel (non-electric) heaters should be used with room doors open or windows slightly open to provide ventilation. The correct fuel, as recommended by the manufacturer, should always be used with these appliances. Vented heaters should have proper venting, and the venting system should be checked frequently. Improper venting is the most frequent cause of carbon monoxide poisoning. Review the installation and operating instructions, and call your local fire department if you have additional questions.

- If your home has space-heating equipment, such as a kerosene heater, do you understand the installation and operating instructions thoroughly?*

1.H Wood-Burning Heating Equipment

Wood-burning stoves should only be installed by a qualified person according to local building codes. Local building code officials or the fire marshal can provide requirements and recommendations for installation.

NOTE: Some insurance companies will not cover fire losses if wood stoves are not installed according to local codes.

- Is wood-burning equipment installed properly?*

1.I Emergency Exit Plan

Fires spread rapidly, so it's important that everyone knows what to do. Develop an emergency exit plan. Choose a meeting place outside your home so you can be sure that everyone has escaped. Practice the plan from time to time to make sure everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.

- Do you have an emergency exit plan and an alternate emergency exit plan in case of a fire, and do you practice the plan regularly?*

1.J Carbon Monoxide Detector

Because CO is odorless, colorless and tasteless, it often goes undetected. Carbon monoxide is a normal byproduct of combustion, which means that any fuel-burning appliance in your home is a potential CO source. Every home with fuel-burning appliances should have at least one CO detector placed in an area near sleeping rooms. Be sure your CO detector displays the Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) label.

- If your home has fuel-burning appliances, is it equipped with at least one carbon monoxide monitor that is properly maintained?*

1.K First Aid Kit

Keep a well-stocked first aid kit in your home. The kit should include, among other things, antiseptic ointment, bandages and gauze pads in assorted sizes, adhesive tape, cold packs, disposable gloves, scissors and tweezers, and eyewash. Make sure everyone knows where to find it and how and when to use the items in it.

- Is your home equipped with a well-stocked first aid kit?*

1.L Utility Shutoffs

Place tags or labels on your home shut-off valves for gas, oil, water and the main shutoff for your electrical supply. Make sure everyone in the home knows where these shutoffs are located and how to safely use them in the event of an emergency.

- Are the locations of all gas, oil, water and main electrical supplies shutoffs known to all adult family members and are they properly labeled?*

2 KITCHEN

In the kitchen, check the range area, all electrical cords, lighting, the step stool, all throw rugs and mats and the telephone area.

2.A Range Area

Placing or storing non-cooking equipment like potholders, dishtowels, or plastic utensils on or near the range may result in fires or burns. Store flammable and combustible items away from range and oven. Remove any towels hanging on oven handles. If towels hang closer to a burner, change the location of the towel rack. If necessary, shorten or remove curtains that could brush against heat sources.

- Are towels, curtains and other items that might catch fire located away from the range?*

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that 70% of all people who die from clothing fires are over 65 years of age. Long sleeves are more likely to catch fire than are short sleeves. Long sleeves are also more apt to catch on pot handles, overturning pots and pans and causing scalds. Roll back long, loose sleeves or fasten them with pins or elastic bands while you are cooking.

- Do you wear clothing with short or close-fitting sleeves while you are cooking?*

Indoor air pollutants may accumulate to unhealthy levels in a kitchen where gas or kerosene-fired appliances are in use. Use ventilation systems or open windows to clean air vapors or smoke.

- Are kitchen ventilation systems or range exhausts functioning properly and are they in use while you are cooking?*

2.B Electrical Cords

Electrical appliances and power cords can cause shock or electrocution if they come in contact with water. Cords can also be damaged by excess heat. Move cords and appliances away from sink areas and hot surfaces. Move appliances closer to wall outlets or to different outlets so you won't need extension cords. If extension cords must be used, install wiring guides so that cords will not hang near sink, range or working areas.

- Are all extension cords and appliance cords located away from the sink or range areas?*

Consider adding new outlets for convenience and safety; ask your electrician to install outlets equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to protect against electric shock. A GFCI is a shock-protection device that will detect electrical fault and shut off electricity before serious injury or death occurs. A GFCI is essential in circuits to bathrooms, laundry facilities, kitchens, swimming pools, and outdoor receptacles. Test the GFCI monthly by pressing the test button and then the reset button to see that it is operating properly.

- Are ground fault circuit interrupters installed on all outlets in close proximity to water and are they periodically tested?*

For more information on cords, refer to the beginning of the checklist.

2.C Lighting

Low lighting and glare can result in injuries. Improve lighting by opening curtains and blinds (unless this causes too much glare). Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the fixture. Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially close the blinds or curtains. Install additional light fixtures (e.g. under-cabinet/over-countertop lighting) as needed, making sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.

- Does good, even lighting exist over the stove, sink and countertop work areas, especially where food is sliced or cut?*

2.D Step Stool

Standing on chairs, boxes or other makeshift items to reach high shelves can result in fall. If you don't have a sturdy step stool, consider buying one. Choose one with a handrail that you can hold onto while standing on the top step. Before climbing on any step stool, make sure it is fully opened and stable. Tighten all screws and braces, and discard step stools with broken parts.

- Do you have a step stool which is stable and in good repair?*

3 LIVING ROOM / FAMILY ROOM

In the living room/family room, check all rugs and runners, electrical and telephone cords, lighting, the fireplace and chimney, the telephone area and all passageways.

3.A Fireplace and Chimney

A clogged chimney can cause a poorly burning fire to result in poisonous fumes and smoke coming back into the house. Do not use the chimney until the blockage has been removed. Have the chimney checked and cleaned by a professional each year.

- Are the chimneys clear from accumulation of leaves or other debris that can clog them?*

Burning wood can cause a build-up of a tarry substance (creosote) inside the chimney. This material can ignite and result in a serious chimney fire.

- Has the chimney been cleaned and checked within the past year?*

3.B Phone Area

For information on the telephone area, refer to the beginning of the checklist.

3.C Passageways

Shadowed or dark areas can hide tripping hazards. Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by your lighting fixtures where more light is needed. Install night-lights to illuminate darkened passageways. Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or by partially closing blinds or curtains.

- Are hallways, passageways between rooms and other heavy traffic areas well lit?*

Furniture, boxes or other items could be an obstruction or tripping hazard, especially in the event of an emergency or fire. Rearrange furniture to open passageways and walkways. Remove boxes and clutter.

- Are exits and passageways kept clear?*

4 BATHROOM

In the bathroom, check bathtub and shower areas, water temperature, rugs and mats, lighting, small electrical appliances and storage areas for medications.

4.A Bathtub and Shower Areas

Wet, soapy tile surfaces are slippery and may contribute to falls. Use non-skid mats in the tub or shower and on the bathroom floor. If you are unstable on your feet, use a stool with a non-skid surface or grab bars in your shower to help prevent falls. Check existing bars for strength and repair if necessary.

- Are bathtubs and showers equipped with non-skid slip mats, abrasive strips or surfaces that are not slippery?*

4.B Water Temperature

Water temperature above 120 degrees can cause scalds. Lower the setting on your hot water heater to “low” or 120 degrees. If you are unfamiliar with the controls of your water heater, ask a qualified technician to adjust it for you. If your landlord controls your hot water system, ask them to consider lowering the setting. Taking baths, rather than showers, reduces the risk of a scald from suddenly changing water temperatures, which may be something to consider for children or the elderly.

NOTE: If the water heater does not have a temperature setting, you can use a thermometer to check the temperature of the water at the tap.

- Is the water temperature 120 degrees or lower?*

4.C Lighting

A light switch near the door will prevent you from walking through a dark area. Install a night-light. Inexpensive lights that plug into outlets are available. Consider replacing the existing switch with a “glow switch” that can be seen in the dark.

- Is a light switch located near the entrance to the bathroom?*

4.D Small Electrical Appliances

Even an appliance that is not turned on, such as a hairdryer, can be potentially hazardous if it is left plugged in. If it falls into water in a sink or bathtub while plugged in, it could cause a lethal shock. Unplug all small appliances when not in use. Never reach into water to retrieve an appliance that has fallen in without being sure that the appliance is unplugged. Consider installing a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) in your bathroom outlet to protect against electric shock.

- Are small electrical appliances such as hairdryers, shavers, curling irons, etc. unplugged when not in use?*
- Are outlets near water equipped with a GFCI?*

4.E Medications

Medications that are not clearly and accurately labeled can be easily mixed up. Taking the wrong medicine or missing a dosage can be dangerous. Be sure that all containers are clearly marked with the contents, doctor’s instructions, expiration date and patient’s name. Dispose of outdated medicines properly.

- Are all medicines stored in the containers they originally came in and are they clearly marked?*

Request non-child-resistant closures from your pharmacist only when you cannot use child-resistant closures.

NOTE: Many poisonings occur when children visiting grandparents go through the medicine cabinet or grandmother's purse. In homes where grandchildren or other youngsters are frequent visitors, medicines should be purchased in containers with child-resistant caps, and the caps properly closed after each use.

- Are all medications stored out of reach of children?*

5 BEDROOMS

In the bedroom, check all rugs and runners, electrical and telephone cords, and areas around the bed.

5.A Areas Around the Bed

Lamps or switches located close to each bed will enable people getting up at night to see where they are going. Rearrange furniture closer to switches or move lamps closer to beds.

- Are lamps or light switches within reach of each bed?*

Never go to sleep with a heating pad if it is turned on because it can cause serious burns even at relatively low settings.

- Do you turn off any heating pads being used before going to sleep?*

In case of an emergency, it's important to be able to reach the telephone without getting out of bed.

- Is there a telephone close to your bed?*

6 LAUNDRY AREAS

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reports thousands of fires associated with clothes dryers occur annually. These fires account for deaths, injuries and millions of dollars in property damage annually. Clean the lint trap before and after each load of clothes. Check connections to ensure proper ventilation.

- Do you clean the lint trap before and after drying each load?*
- Is the back of your dryer cleaned on a regular basis?*
- Is the exhaust hose connected to properly ventilate?*

7 BASEMENT / GARAGE / WORKSHOP / STORAGE AREAS / STAIRS

In the basement, garage, workshop and storage areas, check lighting, fuse boxes or circuit breakers, appliances and power tools, electrical cords, and flammable liquids.

7.A General

Power tools are involved in thousands of injuries each year, most of which are finger injuries. Good lighting can reduce the chance that you will accidentally cut yourself.

- Are work areas – especially areas where power tools are used – well lit?*

Basements, garages and storage areas can contain many tripping hazards, as well as sharp or

pointed tools that can make a fall even more hazardous. Keep an operating flashlight handy. Have an electrician install switches at each entrance to a dark area.

- Can you turn on the lights without first having to walk through a dark area?*

7.B Flammable and Volatile Liquids

If not tightly closed, vapors may escape that may be toxic when inhaled. Check containers periodically to make sure they are tightly closed. Gasoline, kerosene and other flammable liquids should be stored out of living areas in properly labeled, safe containers.

NOTE: Many people are unaware how far gas fumes can travel. CPSC has reports of several cases in which gasoline, stored as much as 10 feet from a gas water heater, exploded.

- Are containers of volatile liquids tightly capped?*
- Are gasoline, paints, solvents or other products that give off vapors or fumes stored away from ignition sources?*

7.C Appliance and Power Tools

Improperly grounded appliances can lead to electric shock. Check with your service person or an electrician if you are in doubt.

- Is the grounding feature on any 3-prong plug in place?*

Ensure all power tools are equipped with safety guards and are kept in good working order.

- Are all power tools properly maintained and are all guards in place?*

7.D Stairs

For all stairways, check lighting, handrails and the condition of the steps and coverings. Stairs should be lighted so that each step, particularly the step edges, can be clearly seen while going up and down stairs. The lighting should not produce glare or shadows along the stairways. Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the light fixture. Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closed blinds and curtains. Have a qualified person add additional light fixtures. Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.

- Are stairs well lighted so you can clearly see the edges?*

Even if you are very familiar with the stairs, lighting is an important factor in preventing falls. You should be able to turn on the lights before you use the stairway from either end. If no other light is available, keep an operating flashlight in a convenient location at the top and bottom of the stairs. Install night-lights at the nearby outlets. Consider installing switches at the top and bottom of the stairs.

- Are light switches located at both the top and bottom of inside stairs?*

7.E Handrails

The handrail should provide a comfortable grip and should always be used when climbing up or going down the steps. Repair broken handrails. Tighten fixtures that hold handrails to the wall. If no handrails are present, install at least one handrail (on the right side as you face down the stairs).

- Are sturdy handrails provided on any stairs in your home?*

If the handrail doesn't extend continuously the full length of the stairs, people who are not aware of this might think they have come to the last step when the handrail stops. Misjudging the last

step can cause a fall. Replace a short handrail with a longer one. Repair or replace step coverings that are in poor condition. Keep stairs free of tripping hazards.

- Do the handrails run continuously from the top to the bottom of the entire flight of stairs?*
- Are the coverings on the steps in good condition?*
- Is the stairway free of clutter and tripping hazards?*

8 HOMES WHERE SMALL CHILDREN LIVE OR VISIT

Homes where small children live or visit require special attention to ensure they are “child-proof.” Have a medicine cabinet that is lockable or out of the child’s reach. Lock cabinets and drawers for matches, lighters, flammable liquids, household cleaners, pesticides, auto chemicals, knives, pool chemicals, etc. Use plastic caps to cover any unused electrical outlets. Install child safety gates at the top and bottom of stairwells. Use a metal fire screen that completely covers the fireplace. Install edge guards for sharp-edged furniture and fireplace hearths.

- If small children live in or visit your home, have you adequately childproofed all areas?*

9 HOMES WITH FIREARMS AND CHILDREN

Unload and lock up any gun in your home. Lock and store ammunition separately. Keep keys where kids are unable to find them. Talk with your kids about guns. Teach them not to touch guns and to tell an adult if they find one.

- If firearms are present in your home, are the guns and ammunition in separate and locked places with keys kept where young children cannot find them?*
- For parents, have you talked to your kids about guns?*

10 SEASONAL SAFETY

If you have young children, chances are you’ve taken care to childproof your home and watch out for common dangers. But what about the safety concerns that change with the seasons? Here are the top tips for each season to help protect your family.

10.A. Summer

1. Grill Away

- Keep grills at least 10 feet from any structures.
- Never grill indoors or near garages or porches.
- Always keep a fire extinguisher on hand when grilling and be sure to dispose of coals properly after they have cooled.

2. Search for Snags

- Check backyards and play areas for tripping hazards such as roots and rocks.
- Inspect play sets for dangerous “S” hooks.

3. Supervise Swimming

- Children should be supervised near pools (even small wading pools) at all times.
- Multiple barriers should be put up between children and pools.

4. Test Your Backyard Safety IQ

- Every minute this summer, approximately 20 children will visit the ER with injuries from backyards and pools.

10.B. Fall

1. Watch Those Flames

- Never leave burning candles or open flames unattended for any period of time.

2. Climb with Care

- When using ladders to clean gutters or decorate, check the rungs, make sure the ladder is securely placed and don't overdo the angle when propping it against your home.

3. Keep it to Treats, No Tricks

- Keep the scariest night of the year fun by purchasing flame-retardant costumes and teaching your kids about Halloween safety.

4. Be Alarmed

- October is Fire Safety month. Make sure that you have smoke alarms on each floor of your home, test them weekly and change the batteries twice a year.

10.C. Winter

1. Gutters Cleaned

- Before winter weather sets in, make sure you clean out your gutters. All the weather debris that might be stuck in there can freeze over and damage your gutters.

2. Winter Holiday Safety

a. Water, water, water your Christmas tree.

Dry trees pose a fire risk – make a fresh cut on the base before putting your tree into a sturdy stand, and water frequently.

b. Check your lights, check them twice.

Inspect all of your electric lights and decorations for damage or wear. Cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires and loose connections may pose a fire or shock hazard.

c. Give wrapping paper a second life.

Don't burn used wrapping paper as it may cause intense flash fires. Consider recycling or repurposing it instead.

d. Know your lights and cords.

Do not connect more miniature light strings together than instructed by the manufacturer (a max of 3 strings is a common rule). Also, be sure to check the rating on your extension cords and do not plug in more than the recommended wattage.

e. Steer your tree clear.

Your tree should be positioned at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources. It should also not block any doorways or exits.

f. Decorate with a safe eye.

Cords should not be run under carpets or be tacked up with metal nails or staples. Small decorations can be choking hazards; keep them out of the reach of toddlers.

g. Look for UL.

The UL mark appears on products that have been tested for safety. Make sure to look for it to help keep your holidays safe and bright

3. Winter Travel

People who travel during a winter storm are at the most risk for death or injury. In fact, 70% of winter storm-related deaths occur in cars.

a. Stay in your vehicle.

Snow and cold can be very disorienting, so it's best not to walk for help – your car can provide much-needed heat and shelter.

b. Run your motor 10 minutes an hour.

About 10 minutes every hour, turn on the engine for heat. Do not leave it continuously running to avoid potential carbon monoxide poisoning from gas trapped by snow and crack your window to let in fresh air. Check that your exhaust pipe is not blocked.

c. Don't sit still.

Be sure to move your arms, legs, toes and fingers regularly to keep blood circulating. Stretch if possible. If you have kids in the car, be sure to have them do the same.

d. Be seen

Tie a colored cloth, preferably red, to your car. After the snow stops falling, if your vehicle is disabled or trapped, lift the hood to indicate that you need help. Leave the overhead light on when the engine is running (be sure to turn off when you turn off the engine).

e. Conserve power

Be careful not to waste battery power – limit use of radio and lights. Run the heater and fans while the engine is on.

f. Carry a winter storm survival kit

Be prepared for the unexpected with an emergency car kit. Your kit should include:

- Mobile phone charger
- Blankets
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First aid kit
- High-calorie, non-perishable food
- Extra clothing
- Sack of sand or kitty litter
- Jumper cables
- Ice scraper
- Snow shovel
- Waterproof matches and small can that could contain a fire

