



# FIRE SAFETY

## For Older Adults

### PROGRAM DIRECTOR'S GUIDE

Dear Senior Center Program Director,

We are pleased to provide you with important information to share with your Center participants—information about safety at home that can help save lives.

**Fact: Older adults are twice as likely to suffer injuries or lose their lives in fires or falls than the population-at-large.**

The Home Safety Council is the only national nonprofit organization solely dedicated to preventing home related injuries that result in nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million medical visits on average each year. Through national programs, partnerships and the support of volunteers, HSC educates people of all ages to be safer in and around their homes. This All-Ways Fire Safe at Home program features a video plus program materials for older adults focusing on fire safety. HSC invites you to help us educate members of your community who are statistically more vulnerable so they can be safer from home fires.

#### This packet includes:

- a 15 minute video, followed by an additional closed caption version, designed to inform and inspire older adults and their caregivers on fire prevention and fire emergency behavior
- two reproducible handouts, which you can share with older adults, their family and friends, and other Senior Center professionals
- a reproducible invitation, which allows you to post screening dates and times for the video
- a 17" x 22" wall poster to help reinforce the safety information

In this guide and video, you'll find suggestions and activities to create a home fire safety program in your Center that emphasizes home improvement, behavior changes, and lifestyle tips to help families be All-Ways Fire Safe at Home. Please take a moment to review this guide and plan the program in a manner that suits your Center's needs. We strongly suggest that you invite someone from your local fire department to co-present this program with you. And, for more information, please visit the Home Safety Council Web site – [WWW.HOMESAFETYCOUNCIL.ORG](http://WWW.HOMESAFETYCOUNCIL.ORG). Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

*Meri-K Appy*

Meri-K Appy  
President  
Home Safety Council

*Angela Mickalide*

Angela Mickalide, Ph.D., CHES  
Director of Education and Outreach  
Home Safety Council







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Keep space heaters at least three feet away from objects that could catch fire

### ANNOUNCING The Program

Before sharing the accompanying video, please remember to announce the program in your Center by sending out reminders and displaying the video screening invitation in high-traffic areas. Encourage members to come with friends or family who might be able to assist them in home fire prevention and readiness tasks that require outside help. You can also photocopy the video invitation as a flyer.

Consider hosting this event with a free lunch or hot beverage social to encourage participation.

If possible, invite a home fire safety expert from your local fire department to join in the presentation. He or she will have facts, information and first-hand experiences to add to the discussion.

After several large group viewings, you can make the video available for checking out to view at home through your Center's library.

### BEFORE Viewing

Begin the discussion by sharing some statistics with your group. Visual reinforcement is important.

If possible, write the following facts on a board or chart paper.

**FACT: Older adults are twice as likely to sustain injuries or lose their lives in fires than the population-at-large.**

**FACT: Smoking is the number one cause of home fire death in the U.S.A. Research by the National Fire Protection Association indicates that "fire safe" cigarettes would eliminate 3 out of 4 cigarette related fire deaths. These cigarettes are more likely to self-extinguish if left unattended.**

*(Some states now require the sale of "fire-safe" cigarettes only. To find out if your state is among them, go to [www.firesafecigarettes.org](http://www.firesafecigarettes.org). Please emphasize that no cigarette is truly "fire-safe" and people still need to be careful when handling any kind of lit cigarettes.)*

Story sharing is an important part of learning. Ask the audience if they have been involved in a home fire emergency or know someone who has. Invite them to share their stories. Lead a short discussion about how prepared these individuals were for the event and what might have been done to prevent the emergency. Explain that while home fires can happen at any time, there are ways to greatly reduce the risk of fire in the home and increase one's chances of survival in an emergency situation. Introduce the video as a way to learn about these topics.

### DURING Viewing

When you see this symbol,  please stop to review what the group has just seen.

**PAUSE AND TALK:** Always stay in the kitchen when food is cooking on the stove. Roll up sleeves. Use oven mitts.

**PAUSE AND TALK:** Plug only one cord into each electrical outlet.

**PAUSE AND TALK:** Make sure space heaters are at least three feet away from anything in the room that can burn.

**PAUSE AND TALK:** Smoke outside. Use deep ashtrays. Check in and around furniture cushions for cigarettes that may have fallen out of sight.

### AFTER Viewing

Start a discussion about the video. The best way to do this is by asking specific questions. Use the following questions or the additional activities found below. Explain that making simple changes in the home and in behavior can save lives—their own and those around them, such as friends, family and grandchildren.

- After viewing this video, what are some of the home fire safety tips you intend to follow in your home?
- What are some of the behaviors and lifestyle changes you might consider changing to help prevent home fires?

As an alternative, make illustrated cards with a fire safety tip, found on the poster, on each. Separate the group into smaller teams to discuss these tips and then lay the cards out in the order of importance to them. They can then conduct this activity before and after the video viewing to see if they would change the priority. Ask each team to share their thinking with the group. Emphasize that there are no right answers since all efforts to prevent or prepare for fire are important.

### REPRODUCIBLE Handouts

Distribute the handouts after your group has viewed the video. You might consider giving out prizes for those who score well on the quiz. (These prizes may even be related to fire safety such as batteries or even a smoke alarm.) You may also wish to discuss the quiz answers as a group exercise and use it as a discussion tool. Leave additional copies on counters or display tables in your Center. You can also give extra copies to the group to pass on to friends and family who could not make the screening.





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Test your smoke alarm once a month with the end of a broom handle

### HANDOUT ONE Checklist

This Checklist can be filled out after viewing the video. Also, encourage older adults to seek the help of a friend or family member. For example, your members may need assistance to check if their smoke alarm will awaken them from a deep sleep.

### HANDOUT TWO Test Your Fire Smarts

#### ANSWERS

Below are the answers to the Fire Smarts Quiz. Additional information that you might want to share with your group is italicized.

#### FIRE SAFE HOMES

1. D. All of the above
2. B. Every month. Batteries should be replaced at least once a year or when the smoke alarm "chirps." *Older adults should ask a friend or family member for help if needed.*
3. G. All of the above

#### BEHAVIOR & LIFESTYLE

4. B. Less likely to cause a home fire. It's a good idea to use them, BUT people must always be careful when handling any kind of lit cigarette.
5. D. All of the above
6. D. A or C. *Choices A and C are preferable to using a fire extinguisher which—if used improperly—could spread the flames.*

#### FIRE EMERGENCIES

7. Possible answers include: test fire alarms once a month; check to make sure outlets are not overloaded; relocate bedroom and living space to first floor; make sure there is a phone in the bedroom; switch to "fire-safe" cigarettes; remain in kitchen when cooking; avoid wearing loose clothing while cooking; make sure space heaters are at least three feet away from other objects that can catch fire; install quick-release bars in the windows of your home.
8. A. Always keep a blanket around to put out a clothing fire if you can't "Stop, Drop and Roll."

9. B. An important fire safety feature in homes that have bars on the windows or doors.
10. A. Leave the home immediately and call the fire department once outside.
11. B. To treat the burn immediately with cool running water for 3-5 minutes. *Older persons have thinner skin, so they must be careful when dealing with heat sources. Be especially careful around hot beverages and tap water.*

### ADDITIONAL Activities

- Prior to presenting the video, set up mock fire hazards in the room using props such as space heaters, cigarettes, ashtrays, phones and other clutter. After viewing, ask your group to make the scenario safer by moving objects in the room or stating how the "scene" should be changed.
- Do the three-minute drill! Ask your group to imagine it is 3 a.m. and the smoke alarm in their home goes off. Answer the following questions individually or as a group.
  - How long will it take for everyone in your home to be aware that it is the smoke alarm and start to take action?
  - How long will it take for everyone to get outside to your established meeting place?
  - How long will it take for you to notify the fire department once you are safely outside?
  - How long will it take for the fire department to respond to your home?
  - How long will it take for the fire department to begin attack?
  - Total elapsed time

**Explain that most fatal fires happen at night when people are asleep. In a home fire, you may have as little as three minutes to wake up and get to safety. Knowing how to prevent and respond quickly to a home fire can save lives.**

- If possible, bring in items such as special smoke alarms for the hard of hearing and deaf. Inviting a fire expert (from the local fire department) is highly recommended to add a real-life perspective and demonstrate proper use of such devices.

**For more information, please visit our web site,  
[WWW.HOMESAFETYCOUNCIL.ORG](http://WWW.HOMESAFETYCOUNCIL.ORG)**





# FIRE SAFETY

## For Older Adults

### FIRE SAFETY CHECKLIST



1. **Have smoke alarms that work.**

You need at least one working smoke alarm on every level of your home. Put them inside or near sleeping areas. Test smoke alarms once a month. Use a broom handle to gently push the "test button." Put new batteries in alarms once a year or when they "chirp," which means low battery power. If your alarms are ten years old or older, get new ones.



2. **Make a home escape plan.**

Know how to get out of every room of your home. Practice your plan at least twice a year. If possible, move your bedroom to the first floor. That can help you get outside quickly if there is a fire.



3. **Keep escape routes clear.**

Clean out clutter. Move any furniture that blocks your way. Make sure doors and windows open easily. If you have security bars on doors and windows, have quick-release bars installed.



4. **If you can't get out...**

Keep a phone in your bedroom to call for help if you can't get out quickly. Write down emergency numbers and tape them to the telephone. Keep your door closed to protect you from the smoke.



5. **A special message for smokers...**

Use "fire-safe" cigarettes and smoke outside. Use large, deep ashtrays on sturdy tables. Wet cigarette and cigar butts with water before putting them in the trash. Stay alert. Do not smoke if you feel sleepy, have taken medication or had alcohol to drink.



6. **Watch for stray cigarette butts.**

Check in and around furniture cushions for cigarettes that may have fallen out of sight.



7. **A recipe for safe cooking...**

Always stay in the kitchen when food is cooking on the stove. Avoid loose clothing and roll up sleeves before you start to cook. Use oven mitts. If you do get a burn, immediately cool it with water for 3 to 5 minutes. Then call for help.



8. **Space heaters need space.**

Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from things that can burn. Turn them off if you leave the room or plan to go to sleep.



9. **Prevent electrical fires.**

Plug only one cord into each electrical outlet. Make sure cords and appliances are in good shape. Unplug appliances when you are not using them.



10. **Fire sprinklers save lives.**

If possible, choose to live in a home or apartment with fire sprinklers. If you are building a new home, have a fire sprinkler system installed. Your local fire department can help you find a sprinkler contractor.

**Important: Will your smoke alarms wake you up when you are sleeping? Have a family member test the alarm while you are napping so you will know if you'll wake up. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, get special smoke alarms that signal with strobe lights and/or vibration. Ask your local fire department for help if you have trouble finding these.**



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*Keep a phone next to your bed and a list of emergency numbers*

## TEST YOUR FIRE SMARTS

### FIRE SAFE Homes

1. Good housekeeping is especially important for fire safety because

- A. throwing out clutter will help keep escape routes clear.
- B. more clutter means more things can catch fire in your home. Papers, magazines and newspapers light up quickly and burn fast!
- C. gently dusting smoke alarms will help keep them working well.
- D. all of the above

2. Smoke alarms are an important fire safety tool. They should be tested

- A. every few years or when the battery runs out.
- B. every month. Batteries should be replaced at least once a year or when the smoke alarm chirps.
- C. every year when it is time to change the battery.
- D. whenever the battery runs out.

3. Anything that gives off heat or requires electricity should be treated as a potential fire or burn hazard in the home. These items include

- A. stove tops and ovens.
- B. space heaters, fireplaces, wood stoves.
- C. electrical appliances such as coffee makers and clothes irons.
- D. overloaded electrical sockets.
- E. candles.
- F. clothes dryers.
- G. all of the above

### BEHAVIOR & Lifestyle

4. Fire-safe cigarettes are

- A. foolproof, so older adults are always safe from fire using them.
- B. less likely to cause a home fire. It's a good idea to use them, BUT people must always be careful when handling any kind of lit cigarette.
- C. all hype! They're just as flammable as regular cigarettes.

5. Fires can start when people

- A. fall asleep while smoking. Fires from lit cigarettes often ignite couches or beds.
- B. drink alcohol or medication that makes them drowsy and/or less aware.
- C. leave the kitchen while cooking food on the stove.
- D. all of the above

6. Many home fires begin in the kitchen. In the event of a small grease or pan fire, you should

- A. put on an oven mitt and slide the lid over the pan to extinguish the fire quickly. Turn off the burner if possible, slide the lid from front to back to minimize contact with flames and heat.
- B. reach for a fire extinguisher first.
- C. take a portable phone outside and call the fire department immediately
- D. A or C

### FIRE Emergencies

7. List three changes that you can make in your home or lifestyle to help prevent fires or increase the chances of a safe escape in the event of a home fire.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Just about everyone has heard of the "Stop, Drop, and Roll" technique if your clothes catch on fire. Those who use a wheelchair or are unable to move as easily should

- A. always keep a blanket around to extinguish clothing fires.
- B. try to perform "Stop, Drop, and Roll" to the extent they can.
- C. keep a fire extinguisher nearby, whether or not you know how to use it.
- D. install more fire sprinklers in their homes.

9. Quick-release security bars are

- A. not worth the money and effort.
- B. an important fire safety feature in homes that have bars on the windows or doors.
- C. are an option for those who do not follow the other safety tips outlined in this program.

10. In the event of a fire, you should

- A. leave the home immediately and call the fire department once outside.
- B. remember to bring along personal items before leaving the home.
- C. call 911 as soon as the fire is discovered.

11. The best way to treat a minor burn or scald is

- A. a pat of butter applied to the affected area.
- B. to treat the skin immediately with cool running water for 3-5 minutes.
- C. both A and B, if possible