

Fire Safety and Preparedness for Your Home, Deck, and Property

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During 2020, fire departments responded to a fire every 23 seconds in the United States. Around 3,500 people (not counting firefighters) died because of fire-related injuries, while 15,200 injuries relating to fires were reported. The total property damage was estimated at almost \$22 billion in that one year alone. Understanding how to prevent a fire and how to prepare in case a fire does break out is important in order to reduce the number of deaths and injuries, as well as

to prevent property loss and other financial damages. [Very young children, the elderly, and people who are impaired by alcohol](#) are at the greatest risk of injury or death during a fire. Pets often come to harm during a fire, too. But there are steps you can take to prepare your home and family.

Kids

Children depend on adults to teach them how to prevent accidentally setting a fire as well as what to do in case they ever experience being trapped by a fire.

Prevention

The first rule of fire safety is prevention. Adults need to make sure their homes are free of frayed or loose electrical cords, overloaded extension cords, or [light fixtures with incorrect bulbs](#). Children also need to be taught to never touch electrical appliances, space heaters, or cords. It's also important to [keep matches and lighters away from children](#).

- [Fire Safety for Kids](#): Teaching children how to be fire smart helps protect them from starting a fire.
- [Fire Safety Videos for Kindergarteners](#): This collection of videos explains fire safety to young children in an approachable, age-appropriate manner.

Preparedness

The first step in preparing children to deal with a fire is for the family to make an escape plan. Parents should explain the plan to their children and then practice it until the children know exactly what to do if a fire ever breaks out. The plan should include

several different scenarios. What if the front door is blocked? What if they can't open their bedroom door? How can they get out through a window? Families should also set off the fire alarms in the house so kids know what they sound like and what they should do if they hear that sound. It's also important to teach kids not to hide if they encounter smoke.

When practicing the plan, it's important to act like a fire is occurring. Set off the smoke detectors. Crawl instead of walk, and show kids how to [touch the doorknob](#) to see if it's hot. If it is hot, kids should practice using a secondary escape route. Then, meet outside at a designated meetup spot (the mailbox or a neighbor's yard are good spots if they are far enough away from the home). It's also a good idea to teach kids [how to call 911](#) and when calling is appropriate.

- [How to Make a Smart Fire Safety Plan](#): *Parents* magazine outlines best practices in designing a workable fire safety plan and teaching it in a non-traumatizing way to children.
- [Fire Safety Tips](#): From checking smoke detector batteries to gently teaching children the best escape routes, these tips can help families prevent and safely prepare for any fire.

Recovery

Children who experience a fire have experienced real trauma. Adults in their lives, including [parents and teachers](#), need to take action to help them recover from the trauma and process it in a healthy manner. Not all kids react to surviving a fire in the same way. Some have nightmares or sleep disturbances, while other children might develop general anxiety or revert to younger behaviors. It's important that the adults in their lives help them move through the experience. Most children will also need professional support. Signs to watch for include increased general anxiety, obsessing about fire, increased separation anxiety, withdrawal from things they used to like, temper tantrums, and even physical symptoms like stomach issues or headaches.

- [Recovering Emotionally After a Residential Fire](#): The American Psychological Association discusses the various traumas associated with surviving a residential fire.
- [Helping Children Cope With Emergencies](#): Different age groups react to emergencies and trauma in different ways, and knowing what behaviors to look for in each age group is important when helping children cope with an emergency.

Seniors

[Adults over the age of 54 are at increased risk of death or injury from a fire.](#) The reasons for this include slower reaction times and medications that slow their reactions even further. It's important that seniors and their families mitigate the risk of a fire breaking out and that seniors know how to react in case of fire.

Prevention

Preventing fires is the best way for seniors to protect themselves. Basic safety practices like not overloading outlets, never leaving a hot pan unattended when cooking, keeping stovetops clean and clear, not smoking in bed or near oxygen tanks, and having a fire escape plan are just as vital for seniors as they are for other adults. Additionally, seniors should install extra smoke alarms so they have a better chance of hearing an alarm even if they are asleep or have taken medication.

- [Senior Fire Safety](#): Basic safety tips for seniors are reviewed here.
- [Ten Most Recommended Fire Safety Tips for Seniors](#): Seniors should follow these tips to prevent fires from breaking out in their homes.

Preparedness

Seniors often depend on things like glasses, hearing aids, mobility devices, and TTY/TDD assistance devices, so they should try to keep these items within reach at all times. Also, their phone and keys should be on their nightstand so they can be grabbed easily. It's also important that stairs, hallways, and paths through rooms be kept clear to avoid creating a tripping hazard that will slow down an escape. Seniors should also make an escape plan and practice it. It's also a good idea to leave a list of emergency numbers, medication information, and medical information with a trusted neighbor or [family member](#).

- [Disaster Preparedness by Seniors for Seniors](#): The Red Cross prepared this comprehensive guide to emergency preparedness that takes into account all of the difficulties seniors face when dealing with a catastrophic event.
- [A Guide to Senior Fire Prevention and Developing an Escape Plan](#): Developing an escape route and at least one alternative escape route and then practicing both is essential for seniors to increase their chance of surviving a fire.

Recovery

Older adults often require more time to recover from traumatic events like a fire than younger adults need. It's important that friends, loved ones, and medical professionals monitor seniors for signs like increased fear, disorientation, confusion, a growing sense of apathy, anger, or excessive grief. Seniors need a strong social support network (neighbors, clubs, family members, friends) to help them cope with their feelings and keep them connected. They also often will need increased assistance from [medical providers](#) to help them cope with the physical and emotional trauma.

- [Tips to Identify and Manage PTSD in Seniors](#): Knowing what PTSD looks like in an older adult and understanding what social and emotional support they need to deal with lingering trauma helps to ensure that seniors have a good outcome following a traumatic event.
- [Anxiety and Older Adults: Overcoming Worry and Fear](#): Anxiety is a common aftereffect of surviving a traumatic event.

Pets

[Pets](#) are often the forgotten players in residential fires. However, pets accidentally cause many fires. They also often suffer injury or death during a fire, and even if they survive, they may experience many of the same emotional traumas as the humans in the family. It's important to include pets in any fire safety plan.

Prevention

Pets do accidentally cause fires, but these fires are still ultimately caused by human carelessness. Pet owners are responsible for ensuring that they do not leave flammable materials accessible to their pets. An excited puppy or curious cat can easily turn something over. This is why it's vital that open fires be thoroughly put out and watched until all embers have died. It's also important to secure stove knobs so that a [pet](#) doesn't accidentally turn on a burner. It's also important to secure cords and outlets. [Space heaters](#) should only be used with human supervision, and it's important that they have safety features that turn them off if they are knocked over.

- [Save a Life! National Pet Fire Safety Day Tips to Protect Your Dog](#): Making sure that a pet can't accidentally start a fire not only protects residences and the people who live inside them, but it also protects the pet from injury or death.
- [National Pet Fire Safety Day Prevention Tips to Keep Pets From Starting Home Fires](#): Pets accidentally start around 1,000 house fires each year, and more than 500,000 pets are harmed by house fires annually.

Preparedness

Pets can't be taught an escape plan in the same way seniors or children can. The best way to [prepare a pet](#) for an emergency is to have leashes or pet carriers near escape points so that the [pet can be safely and quickly removed](#) from the home. Dogs should practice fire drills, though. Like children, they can learn that the fire alarm sound means that they should move to a door. Pets that hide when scared are much harder to rescue. A pet standing by a door means that an adult or firefighter can more easily remove them even as smoke fills the home.

- [Pet Fire Safety](#): The American Humane Society assembled a list of everything pet owners need to think of to prevent fires and to help their pet survive a fire breaking out in their home.
- [Four-Step Fire Escape Plan for Your Pet](#): Using window decals that let rescue workers know how many pets are in the home, keeping leashes by the door, and practicing escape plans are vital ways that pet owners can help their animal survive a residential fire.

Recovery

Animals have a response to [trauma](#) just like humans do. Often, they will have bathroom accidents or be uncharacteristically [snippy](#). Owners need to be calm and comforting. Pets also need to have a routine reestablished as quickly as possible. However, they

should not be brought back home until the home is safe for them to inhabit. They might also need to visit the vet to check for physical or psychological issues.

- [How to Heal an Emotionally Traumatized Pet](#): Animals experience trauma like their owners do, and it's important to help them recover so they can have a happy life.
- [How to Heal a Traumatized Dog? Read it a Story](#): *The New York Times* reports on a program that explores how reading to dogs helps them recover from trauma.

Home, Deck, and Property Preparedness

- [Prepare Your Yard for Wildfire](#): Small things like maintaining a buffer around a home and being diligent about removing dead plants, trees, and other vegetation can help prevent a fire from spreading from a yard to a house.
- [Attached Decks](#): The Homeowner's Wildfire Mitigation Guide, produced by the University of California, discusses how to maintain a deck (including using metal screens and keeping the under-deck area clean of debris) to reduce the chances that it will catch fire.
- [Fire-Resistant Roofing and Siding](#): *This Old House* examines the role that roof and siding materials can play in protecting a home from fire.
- [Clean Gutters to Help Prevent Fire](#): Basic maintenance like keeping the roof and gutters clear of leaves and other vegetation can help prevent a fire from starting in the house's gutters.
- [Garage and Basement Fire Safety](#): Garage and basement fires tend to spread faster and cause more financial damage than other house fires.
- [Shed Office Fires Have Risen Dramatically, Garden Office Owners Are Warned](#): The rise in popularity of offices in garden sheds has led to a similar rise in the number of shed fires recorded each year. However, shed owners can take precautions to ensure the safety of their sheds and themselves.
- [Fire Safety 101 for Home Kitchens](#): Many residential fires begin in the kitchen, and it's important for everyone who cooks or uses a kitchen to understand the basic safety measures needed to prevent (or react to) a kitchen blaze.