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*Safety Depends On Us*

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### By the Numbers: Residential Appliance Fires

Residential appliance fires annually result in an estimated:

**9,600** fires

**25** deaths

**525** injuries

**\$211** million in property loss

*Source: National Fire Incident Reporting System*

## Focus on Fire Safety: Appliance Fires

Most homes have a multitude of electrical appliances ranging from small kitchen items such as toasters and microwaves to major appliances like clothes dryers and dishwashers. While appliances make our lives much easier, they also pose significant risks - including fire - if not maintained properly.

Appliance fire safety is a matter of keeping your appliances in good working order, as well as using them as they were intended. The average homeowner has several thousand dollars invested in appliances. To protect your investment and to avoid the potential risk of fire, find out what to check for to ensure your appliances don't put you or your family at risk.



Never force a three-prong cord into a two-slot outlet.

## **Stop an Appliance Fire Before It Starts!**

- Immediately fix appliances or lamps that sputter or spark.
- Keep appliances away from wet areas, especially in the kitchen, bathroom, basement, and garage.
- If an appliance has a three-prong plug, never force it into a two-prong outlet or extension cord.
- Use extension cords wisely and don't overload them.
- Regularly check your extension cords to make sure the plastic is not worn away or coming apart at the ends.
- Never use an extension cord as permanent wiring.
- Instead of a simple extension cord, get a laboratory-tested extension cord with built-in circuit breakers.
- Check your wiring on a regular basis. Look for outlets that don't work, light switches that are hot to the touch, and lights that flicker. This could mean something is wrong and should be checked by an electrician.
- Keep clothes, curtains, and other potentially combustible items at least three feet from all heaters.

## Clothes Dryer Fire Safety Tips



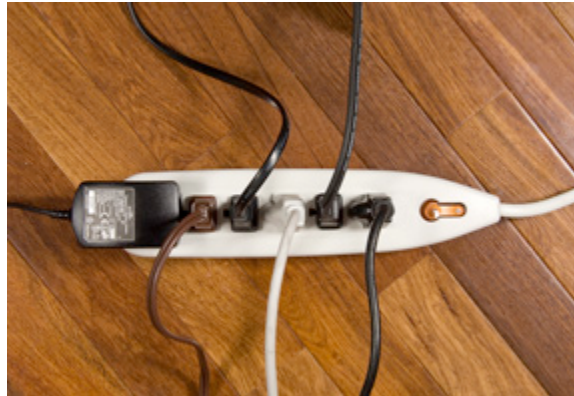
Clean the lint filter before or after each use.

- Have your dryer installed and serviced by a professional.
- Do not operate the dryer without a lint filter. Clean the lint filter before or after each use. Remove accumulated lint around the drum.
- Rigid or flexible metal venting materials should be used to sustain proper air flow and drying time.
- Make sure the air exhaust bent pipe is not restricted and the outdoor vent flap will open when the dryer is operating.
- Once a year, or more often if you notice that it is taking longer than normal for your clothes to dry, clean lint out of the vent pipe or have a dryer lint removal service do it for you.
- Keep dryers in good working order. Gas dryers should be inspected by a professional to ensure that the gas line and connection are intact and free of leaks.
- Make sure the right plug and outlet are used and that the machine is connected properly.
- Do not leave a dryer running if you leave home or when you go to bed.
- Never dry items that have come in contact with flammable substances, such as cooking oil, gasoline, paint thinner, or alcohol.
- Keep the dryer area clear of things that can burn, such as boxes or clothing.

## Washer Fire Safety Tips

- Avoid overloading a washing machine.
- Washing machines should be properly grounded.
- Make sure the right plug and outlet are used and that the machine is connected properly.

## Extension Cords



Don't overload extension cords or wall sockets.

When it comes to appliance safety, one of the most commonly used and misused items is the extension cord. Extension cords pose several risks:

- Connections may not be secure.
- Power fluctuations may damage the appliance.
- Poor connections can cause sparks that may start a fire.

To reduce the risk of fire from extension cords:

- Use electrical extension cords wisely and don't overload them.
- Consider having additional circuits or outlets added by a qualified electrician so you do not have to use extension cords.
- Replace or repair loose or frayed cords.
- Avoid running extension cords across doorways or under carpets.

## Oven Ranges

The most common household accidents happen when operating the family oven or range. To reduce this risk:

- Keep burners, the stove top, and oven clean and free of grease and other flammable debris.
- Never leave flammable items such as hot pads or towels near burners.
- Don't leave food cooking unattended.
- Never spray aerosols near a flame.
- Always turn pot handles inward to avoid the possibility of knocking a pot off the stove.
- Never wear clothing with long, loose sleeves while cooking.
- Periodically inspect electrical cords and gas connections for wear and damage.

## Microwave Ovens

- Never operate a unit with a door that is bent, warped, or otherwise damaged in a way that prevents it from closing firmly.
- Don't stand directly in front of the microwave while it is operating.
- Avoid overheating liquids; they may super-heat and erupt, causing severe burns.
- Never operate an empty oven.
- Keep the inside of the oven, the door, and all seals clean and free of debris.
- Never use metal pans and utensils in the unit as arcing will occur.
- Periodically check for microwave leakage with an FDA-approved testing device.

## Electrical System Safety



Replace worn, old, or damaged appliance cords right away.

- If your power goes out a lot or the lights in your home flicker, smell bad, or make noise, have an electrician come to inspect your wiring.
- The electrical outlet in the bathroom should have a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI). This is a tool that protects you from a dangerous shock when water and electricity come together. An electrician can install a GFCI for you.
- All electrical outlets and switches should be covered by “face plates.”
- Inspect electrical cords to make sure they are in good condition.
- Don't tie or knot cords.
- Don't let furniture sit on cords.

## Most Importantly... Be Prepared for a Fire!

One of the best ways to protect yourself and your family is to have a working smoke alarm that alerts you to both a fire that has flames and a smoky fire that has fumes without flames. It is called a “Dual Sensor Smoke Alarm.” A smoke alarm greatly reduces your chances of dying in a fire.

Make and practice a home fire escape plan and set a meeting place outside. Make sure everyone in your family knows at least two escape routes from their bedrooms.

## **Electrical Fire Safety**

### **A Factsheet on Home Electrical Fire Prevention**

Electrical fires in our homes claim the lives of 485 Americans each year and injure 2,305 more. Some of these fires are caused by electrical system failures and appliance defects, but many more are caused by the misuse and poor maintenance of electrical appliances, incorrectly installed wiring, and overloaded circuits and extension cords.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) would like consumers to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from electrical fires.

#### **The Problem**

During a typical year, home electrical problems account for 67,800 fires, 485 deaths, and \$868 million in property losses. Home electrical wiring causes twice as many fires as electrical appliances.

#### **The Facts**

December is the most dangerous month for electrical fires. Fire deaths are highest in winter months which call for more indoor activities and increase in lighting, heating, and appliance use. Most electrical wiring fires start in the bedroom.

#### **The Cause**

##### **Electrical Wiring**

Most electrical fires result from problems with "fixed wiring" such as faulty electrical outlets and old wiring. Problems with cords and plugs, such as extension and appliance cords, also cause many home electrical fires.

In urban areas, faulty wiring accounts for 33% of residential electrical fires.

Many avoidable electrical fires can be traced to misuse of electric cords, such as overloading circuits, poor maintenance and running the cords under rugs or in high traffic areas.

## **Home Appliances**

The home appliances most often involved in electrical fires are electric stoves and ovens, dryers, central heating units, televisions, radios and record players.

### **Safety Precautions**

- Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring.
- Frayed wires can cause fires. Replace all worn, old or damaged appliance cords immediately.
- Use electrical extension cords wisely and don't overload them.
- Keep electrical appliances away from wet floors and counters; pay special care to electrical appliances in the bathroom and kitchen.
- When buying electrical appliances look for products evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Don't allow children to play with or around electrical appliances like space heaters, irons and hair dryers.
- Keep clothes, curtains and other potentially combustible items at least three feet from all heaters.
- If an appliance has a three-prong plug, use it only in a three-slot outlet. Never force it to fit into a two-slot outlet or extension cord.
- Never overload extension cords or wall sockets. Immediately shut off, then professionally replace, light switches that are hot to the touch and lights that flicker. Use safety closures to "child-proof" electrical outlets.
- Check your electrical tools regularly for signs of wear. If the cords are frayed or cracked, replace them. Replace any tool if it causes even small electrical shocks, overheats, shorts out or gives off smoke or sparks.

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.

# **Flood Fire Safety**

A wide range of natural disasters occurs within the United States every year. Natural disasters can have a devastating effect on you and your home. The U.S. Fire Administration encourages you to use the following safety tips to help protect yourself, your family and your home from the potential threat of fire during or after a flood. You can greatly reduce your chances of becoming a fire casualty by being able to identify potential hazards and following the outlined safety tips.

## **Types of Fire Related Hazards Present During and After a Flood**

- Generators are often used during power outages. Unless generators are properly used and maintained, they can be very hazardous.
- Alternative heating devices used incorrectly create fire hazards. Proper use and maintenance can decrease the possibility of a fire.
- Leaking above ground gas lines, damaged or leaking gas or propane containers, and leaking vehicle gas tanks may explode or ignite.
- Pools of water and even appliances can be electrically charged. This can result in a dangerous electrical fire.
- Appliances that have been exposed to water can short and become a fire hazard.

## **Chemical Safety**

- Look for combustible liquids like gasoline, lighter fluid, and paint thinner that may have spilled. Thoroughly clean the spill and place containers in a well-ventilated area.
- Keep combustible liquids away from heat sources.

## **Electrical Safety**

- If your home has sustained flood or water damage, and you can safely get to the main breaker or fuse box, turn off the power.
- Assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged. This includes cable TV feeds.
- Be aware of and avoid downed utility lines. Report downed or damaged power lines to the utility company or emergency services.

- Remove standing water, wet carpets and furnishings. Air dry your home with good ventilation before restoring power.
- Have a licensed electrician check your home for damage.

## **Generator safety**

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines when using generators.
- Use a generator or other fuel-powered machines outside the home. CO fumes are odorless and can quickly overwhelm you indoors.
- Use the appropriate sized and type power cords to carry the electric load. Overloaded cords can overheat and cause fires.
- Never run cords under rugs or carpets where heat might build up or damage to a cord may go unnoticed.
- Always refuel generators outdoors.
- Never connect generators to another power source such as power lines. The reverse flow of electricity or 'backfeed' can electrocute an unsuspecting utility worker.

## **Heating safety**

- Kerosene heaters may not be legal in your area and should only be used where approved by authorities.
- Do not use the kitchen oven range to heat your home. In addition to being a fire hazard, it can be a source of toxic fumes.
- Alternative heaters need their space. Keep anything combustible at least 3 feet away.
- Make sure your alternative heaters have 'tip switches.' These 'tip switches' are designed to automatically turn off the heater in the event they tip over.
- Only use the type of fuel recommended by the manufacturer and follow suggested guidelines.
- Never refill a space heater while it is operating or still hot.
- Refuel heaters only outdoors.

- Make sure wood stoves are properly installed, and at least 3 feet away from combustible materials. Ensure they have the proper floor support and adequate ventilation.
- Use a glass or metal screen in front of your fireplace to prevent sparks from igniting nearby carpets, furniture or other combustible items.

### **and Remember...**

- Do not use alternative heating devices to dry clothes or furnishings.
- Be careful when using candles. Keep the flame away from combustible objects and out of the reach of children.
- Never thaw frozen pipes with a blow torch or other open flame. Use hot water or a device, like a hand-held dryer, evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Some smoke alarms may be dependent on your home's electrical service and could be inoperative during a power outage. Check to see if your smoke alarm uses a back-up battery and install a new battery at least once a year.
- Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of your home.
- All smoke alarms should be tested monthly. All batteries should be replaced with new ones at least once a year.
- If there is a fire hydrant near your home, keep it clear of debris for easy access by the fire department.

## **Portable Generator Hazards**

### **Portable Generator Safety**

Portable generators are useful when temporary or remote electric power is needed, but they can be hazardous. The primary hazards to avoid when using them are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock or electrocution, and fire.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) would like you to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from improper use of portable generators.

## **To Avoid Carbon Monoxide Hazards:**

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents.
- NEVER use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery backup) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home, following manufacturer's instructions.
- Test CO alarms often and replace batteries when needed.

## **To Avoid Electrical Hazards:**

- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure entire extension cord is free of cuts or tears and the plug has all 3 prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- NEVER plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as backfeeding, can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If necessary to connect generator to house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment. Or, your utility company may be able to install an appropriate transfer switch