

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Be Safe From Fire

Every year in America, over 4,000 people die and more than 20,000 are injured in fires. Around 80% of those fires are in homes. Most of those injuries could be prevented with some safety steps. **Older adults are more than twice as likely to die in a home fire than other age groups.** People over the age of 80 die in fires at a rate *three times* higher than the rest of the population. Poor vision, limited mobility, hearing loss, a reduced sense of smell, medication side effects (drowsiness) and dementia all contribute to the danger of fire for seniors. Caregivers can help prevent tragedies by *reducing the chance* of the person in their care being killed or injured by a fire.

### The Home Fire Escape Plan

More than 50% of home fire deaths occur between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM when most people are sleeping. People with disabilities may have physical limitations and a decreased ability to react in a fire emergency. Special fire warning devices are available, such as smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light for the deaf and hard of hearing. Draw a fire escape plan on paper and plan the escape around the person's capabilities.

#### ✓ **Three essential bedside items:**

Eyeglasses, whistle and a phone. You need your glasses to see how to escape from fire and avoid injury. The whistle lets people know where you are so that you can be rescued and helps you warn others of fire. If you are trapped,

the phone will let you call for help. Remember, your first priority is to *get out of the building*. Don't stop to call the fire department until you are safely outside.

#### ✓ **Plan your escape route:** Know

two ways out of every room—a primary and back-up routes mapped out for each room. Ensure escape routes are wide enough for a walker or wheelchair and remove items that may block your way out. *Practice getting out.* If you

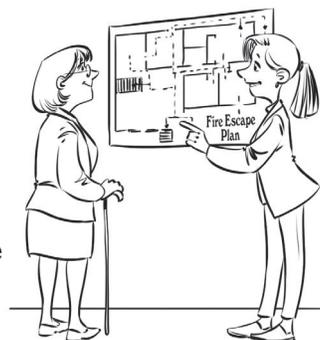
have practiced escape routes, your memory and instinct will help you move in the right direction.

#### ✓ **Check windows from which escape is planned:**

Can you open the window? Be sure exits *allow* you to exit!

#### ✓ **Share your escape plans** with your family, the building manager or neighbors. Everybody should know where to meet outside the building and what routes everyone is taking.

#### ✓ **If you have impairments** that might make it difficult for you to escape from fire, let your local fire department and other emergency service providers know. Many departments issue special window stickers to mark the bedrooms of people with special needs.



Source: FEMA.gov

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on page 2

## The Big Four Fire Starters

**1. Smoking.** Smokers are seven times more likely than nonsmokers to be fire victims. Smoking materials are the *number one* cause of home fires that kill seniors. Practice safer smoking habits: Never leave smoking materials (cigarettes, cigars, pipes, lighters) unattended. Use wide-lipped “safety ashtrays.” Douse ashtrays with water and empty them into a metal container before going to bed. Make it a **RULE** to never smoke in bed, while lying down, or on upholstered furniture—especially when you are drowsy or taking medication that makes you sleepy. Check all furniture and carpets for fallen cigarettes and ashes before leaving home or going to sleep. Set your cigarette lighter on “low” to prevent burns. Keep all smoking materials out of bedrooms. Burning bedclothes can create a fire from which escape is impossible and toxic fumes from the smoke can kill. ***Never allow smoking near an oxygen tank.***



**2. Heating equipment.** Many people use space heaters during cold weather months. However, space heaters are responsible for two out of every three home-heating fires. Especially dangerous are kerosene heaters, woodstoves and electric space heaters. Buy only UL approved heaters and use only the manufacturer’s recommended fuel for each heater. When purchasing an electric space heater, look for heaters with automatic shut-off features. Do *not* use electric space heaters in the bathroom or other wet areas. Give space heaters space. Place heaters at least three feet from any combustible material, such as bedding, furniture, fabric and paper. Once a year, have chimneys, fireplaces, wood stoves and furnaces serviced. ***Never use a cook stove to heat your home.***

**3. Cooking** is the third leading cause of fire deaths. For the elderly, the kitchen can be a dangerous place. *Most kitchen fires occur when cooking food is left unattended.* If you must leave the kitchen while cooking, turn off the burner. If there’s something in the oven, check it every 15 minutes. Use a bell timer to remind you. If you leave the kitchen briefly, carry a spoon or potholder with you to remind you to return. If a fire starts in a pan, put a lid on it. ***Never throw water on a grease fire.*** Keep flammable liquids, like alcohol and cooking oils, and paper away from the stove. Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen (but not right next to the stove) and learn how to use it. Wear snug clothing without loose, dangling sleeves; don’t leave paper towels and plastic wrap near the stove; and remove flammable liquids from the kitchen. Never leave the stove unattended.

**4. Faulty wiring.** Many seniors live in older homes with wiring problems. Regularly inspect extension cords for exposed wires or loose plugs. Unplug them when not in use. If you need to plug in two or three appliances, lamps, etc., get a UL-approved unit that has built-in circuit breakers. ***If you see or smell smoke or sparks coming from any electrical appliance or outlet, shut off the main breaker and call an electrician at once.***

Source: U.S. Fire Administration; Home Safety Council

## Taking Care of Yourself—Blogging—A Great Pastime

In the world of social networking, the elderly have found a perfect pastime—blogging.

- ✓ It keeps retired people socially connected and helps avoid a lonesome and isolated lifestyle.
- ✓ It creates a new, extended social circle for seniors even after they leave the company of colleagues in the workplace.
- ✓ It keeps the elderly updated with new trends.
- ✓ Skype and email help people with mobility issues keep up with family and friends.
- ✓ Blogging gets the thinking process active and helps mental focus.



Source: [www.retirementhomes.com](http://www.retirementhomes.com)

## NATURAL GAS SAFETY

### If you smell gas or suspect a gas leak:

- Open windows to let in fresh air.
- Do not turn *on or off* any electrical appliances or light switches.
- Do not attempt to locate the leak.
- Do not use house phone or cell phone in the house.
- Do not smoke or light matches.
- Leave the house and from a safe distance call 911.

Source: New York City Fire Department

## Live Life Laughing!

Drug stores make sick people walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions and healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front!



## Inspiration

You can disagree with an argument, but not with a personal experience.

## Don't Fall – Be Safe

Stop walking or rolling when you're using your mobile or smart phone.

*The Comfort of Home*®

### **Our Purpose**

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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## **SAFETY TIPS—Trim the Tree Safely**

Christmas trees pose a *serious* fire danger if not properly cared for.

- ★ Do not place the tree where it may block exits.
- ★ Keep live trees in a sturdy stand, supplied with water at all times; dry Christmas trees catch fire easily.
- ★ Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any flame or heat source. Place it near an outlet so that cords are not running where the senior can trip. Inspect electrical lights and extension cords for wear and replace any cords that are beginning to fray or have broken sockets; also pay attention to outdoor lights.
- ★ String no more than three strands of lights together and make sure all lights bear the (UL) label.
- ★ Unplug all lights—inside and out—before going to bed or leaving home.
- ★ Safely dispose of the tree. Dried-out trees are flammable and should not be left inside the home or garage, or placed against the house.

Candles are another special concern during the holiday season. Never leave a candle burning overnight. Keep them away from flammable material.

Source: [Safetyresource.org](http://Safetyresource.org)

NEXT ISSUE... HYPOTHERMIA - WHY AM I SO COLD?