



the abc's of fire safety

It's important that you know the following information about preventing, fighting and escaping residential fires.

Fires and Fire Extinguishers

There are different types of fires, depending on the material burning. Fire extinguishers are classified according to the type of burning materials they are designed to extinguish: A is for paper, wood and natural fabric; B is for grease, oil and combustible fuels; and C is for electrical fires. But since residential fires can involve any type of material, every home should have at least one multi-purpose ABC fire extinguisher that is easy to use. In addition, if you store chemicals, you should have an extinguisher designed for that specific chemical in order to ensure that no adverse reaction is caused by the mixture of the burning chemical with the fire extinguisher solution. For example, a poisonous gas is produced when chlorine comes in contact with ammonia, yet ammonia is found in most Class A extinguishers. Remember that your fire extinguishers should be positioned near (but not too close to) cooking areas, fireplaces and other likely sources of fire, and should be inspected and/or replaced according to safety guidelines.

Smoke Detectors

There should be at least one smoke detector on every floor of your home, as well as outside each

bedroom in larger homes. If any resident is hearing-impaired, consider strobe-light alarms. To avoid false alarms, only use smoke detectors designed for specific areas. For example, ionization types are best for bedroom areas, and less sensitive photo-electric detectors are better for the kitchen. Some building and safety codes require hard-wired detectors that are permanently connected to AC power, with back-up battery power. Check with the fire department for recommended types, and get a qualified electrician to install hard-wired detectors. Keep all smoke detectors dust-free, and don't paint them. Remember to test and replace the batteries regularly, and note the units' expiry dates – they usually need replacing every 5-10 years.

Security Precautions, Prevention and Protection

You want to protect your family and your valuables, so it is wise to do what you can to prevent fires, rather than only react to them. For instance, experts urge all homeowners to discourage smoking indoors, especially in bedrooms, and to be wary of purchasing flammable fabrics and furnishings, or unsafe, unapproved building materials. It's also recommended that you ensure that your priceless valuables and critical financial records are kept in a fire-proof safe, preferably away from home, or that you keep copies of critical documents elsewhere. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Learn how to recognize hazardous conditions and practice good fire-safe habits. For the latest information on preventing, fighting and escaping residential fires, be sure to contact your local fire department.