



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

# Community Fire Safety

The Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation  
and  
Defence Estates Operations Housing



**DE**  
**DEFENCE ESTATES**  
*Delivering Estate Solutions to Defence Needs*

# Introduction

Many fires in the home are caused by a single moment of carelessness and could be easily prevented. It is important to be aware of possible fire hazards around the home and to take steps to protect you and your family from fire.

The Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation is continuously striving to make the communities we serve safer. Our homes are generally the place we feel the safest; unfortunately homes are also the place where the overwhelming majority of fire deaths and injuries occur.

If a fire does occur within the home survival will greatly depend on how people react and the preventative measures already in place.

The information in this booklet is intended to provide practical advice and guidance on fire safety in the home, action points to make the home a safer place and advice on how to react should the unthinkable happen.

Should you have further concerns or need advice, please contact your nearest Defence Fire and Rescue Service Fire Safety Officer, whose contact details will be available from your Defence Estates Operations Housing Information Centre.

## Advice and information

### Open Fires

Always use a fireguard. Logs or coal should be stored outside the fireguard - preferably in a container designed for the purpose.

Mirrors should not be hung over the fire - it encourages people to get too close to the fire.

Clothes should not be aired too close to the fire - do not site closer than 1 metre to an open fire. Likewise never put a heater near to clothing or furnishings.

Firelighters, matches, aerosol sprays, etc, are highly flammable and should not be kept near to any source of heat.

### Chimneys

Chimneys should be swept clean at a period dependant on the type of fuel used; that is

- At least annually when using smokeless fuel, oil fired or gas appliances.
- Twice a year when using Bituminous coal.
- Quarterly (i.e. three monthly) when using wood burning appliances.

Use and advice can be sought from your Housing Manager.

Some signs of a chimney fire are red-hot particles falling from the chimney into the hearth, a roaring fire in the chimney or a chimney breast too hot to touch.

If a chimney fire is not dealt with promptly it may spread to the rest of the house.

If you suspect a chimney fire call the Fire Service immediately. Some people believe the Fire Service charge to attend chimney fires - this is not true.

## Candles and tea lights

If you use candles ensure that they are not left lit and unattended. Always put them in an approved holder and place on a flat, heat resistant surface.

Never place candles on top of a TV or other plastic combustible surfaces.

Keep candles out of reach of children and pets and well away from curtains, furniture and draughts.

Never leave a burning candle in a child's bedroom.

Make sure they are properly extinguished, particularly at bedtime. Risk of fire or injury is higher if a lighted candle is moved while it is alight.

## Smoking Materials

Whether you or others in your home smoke, or whether you have occasional guests or visitors who smoke, you need to know the dangers. Every three days someone dies from a fire caused by a cigarette.

Take care if you smoke when you are drowsy, taking prescribed drugs or if you have been drinking. It's too easy to fall asleep and not notice that a cigarette is still burning.

Don't light up when you need to lie down. Despite the risk of falling asleep, or setting the bed on fire, people are still smoking in bed.

Don't leave a cigarette, cigar or pipe lying around. They can easily overbalance as they burn down, land on a carpet or newspaper, and start a fire.

Take responsibility to keep lighters and matches out of reach of children, children find them fascinating, and have been known to take them to bed to play with them!

Consider buying child-resistant lighters and matchboxes.

Use a proper ashtray. Make sure the ashtray is heavy, can't tip over easily, and is made of a material that won't burn.

Never tap your ash into a wastepaper basket - only an ashtray. Make sure it can't be easily knocked over and don't let ash build up.

Only empty ashtrays into waste disposal bins when you are sure the smoking materials are fully extinguished and cold.

## Electrical Safety

Don't underestimate the fire risk from electricity. Just because there's no flame doesn't mean there's no risk. Electric wires don't even need to touch anything for a spark to jump and a fire to start.

Turn off and unplug electrical appliances when they are not being used, unless they are designed to be left on (for example, freezers and video recorders).

What to check for:

- Watch out for hot plugs and sockets, fuses that blow for no reason, flickering lights, and scorch marks on sockets or plugs.
- Check electrical leads and plugs for wear and tear and faulty wiring. Frayed leads or exposed internal wires are fire risks.
- Don't overload sockets – use one plug in each socket.
- Keep electrical leads, plugs and appliances away from water.
- Televisions should not be left in the 'Standby' mode, they should always be switched off.
- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order, and have them serviced regularly. This is especially important for washing machines and tumble dryers.
- Never buy an electrical appliance without knowing it is safe to use. New appliances should have the British or European safety mark on it. If the appliance is second-hand, always have it checked by a qualified electrician before you use it.
- Never run cables under mats or carpets where you cannot see wear and tear.
- Ensure that the two pin plug on any electrical appliance imported from abroad has been changed for a square three pin English plug. Adaptors are only meant as a short term solution and not for permanent use. Never force a continental two pin plug into an English three pin socket.
- Never use the cooker grill with the door closed unless the appliance is specifically designed to do this.

### Electrical blanket safety

Always follow manufacturer's instructions.

Over blankets are designed to be left on overnight, but under blankets must be switched off before getting into bed. Ensure you check which type you own and use it appropriately.

Don't get an electric blanket wet. If it gets wet, don't use it until it is completely dry. Never switch it on to dry.

Store electric blankets flat or rolled – never fold them. This will avoid the insulation inside the blanket from breaking down.

## Heaters

Heaters should be kept well away from curtains and furniture, and as a rule of thumb at least one metre (three feet) away.

Don't dry washing on or near heaters, or on fireguards.

Don't cover the air vents of storage heaters, fan heaters and convection heaters.

Both gas and paraffin heaters should only be used in well-ventilated areas.

## The Bedroom

If subdued lighting is required in the bedroom use a low wattage bulb in the lamp, do not ever cover the lamp with a cloth.

Never smoke in bed.

## The Kitchen

The kitchen is probably the most dangerous room in the house, even if you don't have a deep-fryer, a moment's distraction while cooking, being careless with domestic appliances - it's easy to see why most fires in the home start in the kitchen. Don't be another statistic - stop fire before it starts!

The following points should be observed:

- Never leave a saucepan on the heat if you get called away.
- Keep the top of the cooker and the grill tray clean and free from grease and residual food.
- Keep the toaster away from flammable items and clean it out regularly.
- Care should be taken so that tea towels are not left where they can come into contact with hot surfaces where they could cause a fire.
- All appliances should be switched-off and where necessary unplugged when finished with or when not in use.
- Care should be taken with the positioning of pan-handles so that they are not directly over gas rings or hot plates. Failure to observe this warning may result in burns or scalds.
- Don't fill chip pans or deep-fryers more than a third full, follow manufacturers instructions.
- If the oil starts to smoke or boil, don't put food in - switch the appliance off and leave the pan to cool.
- Make sure the food you put into the appliance is dry.
- Never use the grill with the door in the closed position unless it is specifically designed to do so, check the manufacturer's operating instructions.

If a chip pan or deep-fryer should ever catch fire:

- **Never** pour water onto a chip pan or oil fire - it will make the oil explode and cause fierce flames.
- Only attempt to put the fire out if it is in its early stages and you are completely sure you can put it out and stay safe. **Do not** attempt to move the pan.
- If you have a fire blanket, place it over the appliance and turn off the heat.
- If you don't have a fire blanket, run a tea towel under the tap making sure you wring it out carefully, and place it over the appliance.
- Call the fire brigade and leave the pan to cool completely.

## General Safety - Plan in advance

### Smoke Alarms

A smoke alarm is a warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire; the alarm provides you with vital time to escape, should the occasion occur. Smoke alarms do not stop fires, but give warning if one does occur, especially important should a fire occur during the night when the family is asleep in bed.

A smoke alarm is the simplest single step that can be taken to cut the risk of dying from fire in your home, they are already installed within you service families accommodation (SFA) and service single living accommodation (SSLA). They should be:

- Provided on each level in your home/SFA on the ceiling in hallways and landings.
- Kept free from dust by gently vacuuming the inside and tested once a week. If the alarm does not open, vacuum through the holes in the casing.

When a fire alarm battery is running down and coming to the end of its life the alarm will 'beep' at intervals. **Do Not** remove the battery without replacing it for another one.

### Night Time Routine

Many fires in the home start at night, therefore, make sure you have a bedtime fire safety routine to help you and your family keep safe. That is:

- Switch-off and unplug all electrical appliances not designed to stay on.
- Make sure all smoking materials are put out and are cold before emptying ashtrays.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Shut all doors.

## Planning Your Escape Route

If your home was to catch fire, you may have to get out in dark and difficult conditions. It would be a lot easier if you have already planned your escape route, know where to go and rehearse the plan.

Your escape route should be kept free of any obstructions.

Remember, your escape route may be in darkness and although family members may be aware of the procedures in place, don't forget visitors who may be staying; they will need assistance, especially if the escape plan involves the use of door keys.

Do not attempt to open doors looking for the source of the fire and especially if a fire alarm is sounding behind the door.

Alert everyone else in the house and make your way out of the building closing all doors behind you as you go.

Notify the fire brigade by dialing 999 or 112<sup>1</sup>.

## Top Fire Safety Tips

- A smoke alarm should be installed on each level in your home.
- Test the batteries in your smoke alarm every week. The battery will be changed on an annual basis by your local Defence Estates office or their sub-contractor - never remove them.
- Avoid leaving children in the kitchen alone when cooking - keep matches and saucepan handles out of their reach.
- Take care when cooking with hot oil - it can catch fire easily.
- Don't overload electrical sockets - try and keep to one plug per socket.
- Stub cigarettes out properly and dispose of them carefully.
- Be careful with candles and make sure they are secured in a proper holder and away from materials that may catch fire - like curtains.
- Be prepared by making a plan of escape.
- Make bedtime routine checks.

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<sup>1</sup> 112 is the European emergency phone number and can be used in parallel with the recognised UK 999 emergency number. You can call the 112 to contact emergency services (ambulances, fire-fighters and the police) in any country of the European Union. You can use the 112 from fixed phones, including payphones, or mobile phones. Calls to the 112 are always free of charge and functions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Community Fire Safety Home Visit Request

Please complete all relevant details. This form should take you no more than five minutes to complete.

### Occupiers Name:

Title:  Forename:  Family Name:

### Property to visit:

Number or Name:

Street:

Town:

Postcode:

Telephone No:

E-mail:

### To enable us to prioritise our response to your request please complete the following:

Do you have a working smoke alarm?

Is there anyone in the house over 65 years of age?

Does anyone living in the house smoke ?

Is there anyone living in the house who would have problems getting out if there was a fire?

Other comments:

### ***Once you have completed this form please hand-in to your nearest:***

- Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation Regional Office;
- Defence Fire and Rescue Service Fire Station; or
- Local Authority Fire and Rescue Service.

Your Area Housing Manager will assist or advise you in this matter.

