



Fire Safety for Older Adults

April 3, 2025

Fire Safety for Older Adults

Topics we will cover

- **Fire Safety & Risks of fire for Seniors**
- **Smoke Alarms & Carbon Monoxide Detectors**
 - **Free Detector Replacement Program**
 - **Questions & Answers**

Getting Older



Our bodies change:

- Poor eyesight
- Loss of hearing
- Arthritis
- Dementia
- Side effects of medications



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We all age, and we all may wake up with a pain that we swear we did not have when we went to bed. Over time some of these changes in our body creep up on us and over time they have a cumulative effect.

- Our eyesight starts to change, and we do not see as clearly as we once did, and we may not see hazards as quickly as we once did.
- I used to be able to hear the slightest sounds. Once I heard a popping noise from behind a bookcase where my mother had an extension cord plugged into her iron. The wall plug was sparking and had melted a portion of the receptacle. Luckily, I HEARD this, and we were able to get everything under control BEFORE there was a fire.
- Arthritis may set in, and we cannot grasp a pan handle as tightly as we once could.
- We become distracted more easily. I can not tell you how many times my grandparents used to joke about burning a pan on the stove or burning something in the oven.
- I must admit, a few years ago, I went outside to pre-heat our gas BBQ, it was on high, and my cell phone rang so I went inside to take the call. 45-minutes later I remembered the BBQ and came out to a grease fire with my BBQ thermometer over 700 degrees and

flames shooting out the sides of the BBQ cover. Luckily, I just shut off the gas and the fire quickly died ... I was lucky!

- Lastly, some of our medications may have warning labels on them expressing the use of caution ... this includes being around an open flame.

Fire Safety for Older Adults

Did you know?

- Your risk of dying in a home fire is greater as you get older
- Cooking fires are the #1 cause of home fires
- “Smoking” is the leading cause of home fire deaths for adults 65+
- Smoke Alarms give you extra time to escape
- You need to plan your escape route around your abilities

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We have been around fire all our lives. I think most of us enjoy sitting around a campfire or a patio fire pit, maybe even roasting a marshmallow or two. As we get older fire can become more difficult for us to control.

Did you know?

- As we get older our risk of dying in a home fire increases.
- That cooking fires are the #1 cause of home fires.
- That if you smoke, it is the leading cause of home fire deaths for those 65 years of age or older.
- That smoke alarms can give you the extra time you need to save your life
- That everyone needs a plan to escape any room in your house if there is a fire

We will discuss these and much more today.



Fire Safety in the Kitchen



#1 Cause of home fires and burn related injuries:

- Stay in the kitchen while you are cooking or turn OFF the heat
- If simmering, baking or roasting check item regularly
- Keep a pot lid nearby when you cook to snuff out a fire
- Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove so the pots will not be knocked off
- Keep anything that could burn away from the stove top
- After cooking double check to see ALL BURNERS are OFF
- Keep a Fire Extinguisher under your sink

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I love to cook ... and eat! Cooking is all about controlling your heat source. I love our gas range, my brother loves his electric range, and both could start a fire if we left flammable material close by. A dish towel, paper towel, over heated oil, etc. As we get older, if you are going to leave the room, maybe just to go to the bathroom, while cooking TURN OFF the burners.

If you do have a fire in a pan, put a lid over it, and cut off the fire's oxygen.

Boiling water or heating up your favorite glaze, turn the pan's handle towards the back of the stove. If left out, pans can accidentally be knocked and the contents be spilled on you or a visiting grandchild, causing a severe burn. Unfortunately, this happens more than we think.

Be prepared, have a fire extinguisher under your sink. If you have a fire USE IT! If the fire appears too large, get out of the house immediately and then call 911 from the street. Stay outside until help arrives.

Heat Your Home Safely



Safety tips:

- Keep children, pets and objects at least 3-feet away from radiators, space heaters, fireplaces, wood stoves and furnaces
- Buy space heaters with auto shut off if it tips over
- Place space heaters on a level surface, but NOT on wooden surfaces
- Never use an oven or stovetop to heat your home
- **DO NOT** use propane or other heating fuels inside the house
- To prevent scalds, set your water heater no higher than 120 F

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Some of us have space heaters to keep us warm. Great inventions when used correctly. Please make sure when using a space heater, you have it on a level surface that is NOT FLAMABLE (like a wooden table). And that your space heater has an automatic shut off if it tips over.

DO NOT use your oven or range top to heat your home, that is what your furnace is for!

DO NOT use a propane heater or other heating fuel inside your home. These are to be used OUTDOORS in well ventilated areas.

Check to make sure your hot water heater temperature is set to a level that will not scald you. It is recommended the temperature be set no higher than 120 F.

Practice Electrical Safety



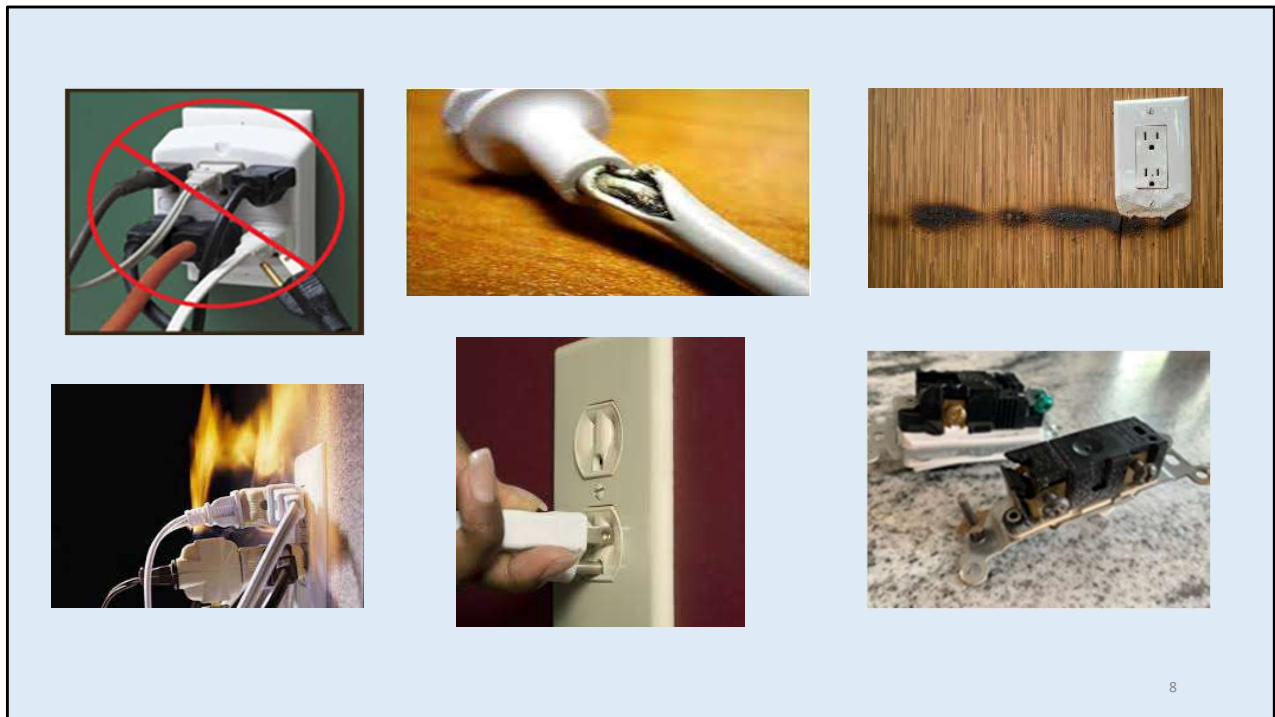
Safety tips:

- Older homes wiring and outlets start to wear
- If your circuit breaker trip frequently, have it professionally checked
- Replace outlets if the plugs do not fit snugly
- Avoid using extension cords
- DO NOT overload electrical circuits
- Check electrical cords for cracking or loose connections

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We had some of our house remodeled after we moved in a few years ago. The electrician replaced MOST of the electrical sockets as they were cracked or would no longer hold the plug tightly.

Over the Holidays we decorate the house and get out the extension cords and the timers to turn lights on/off. This year as I went through the extension cords, I took a closer look at the cords. Some of the extension cords I had inherited over the years were showing their age, tiny cracks in the cord insulation, plugs that were no longer straight, some were even bent. NOT SAFE, I said, and I tossed them out. When was the last time you checked your electrical cords and plugs?



Shown are different electrical related fire dangers.

Example of electrical related issues:

Overloading a receptacle by using a multiple plug in location.

Stacking plug extensions together.

Frayed or broken chord covers.

Partially plugging into a receptacle.

Using a damaged receptacle.

Candle Safety



Safety tips:

- Open flames are pretty - but dangerous
- Consider battery-operated flameless candles
- Only burn a candle if you are in the room
- Use sturdy candleholders that will not tip
- Keep candles at least 12-inches from anything that can burn
- Always use a flashlight in an emergency
- Never use candles in the bedroom
- Never use a candle where medical oxygen is being used

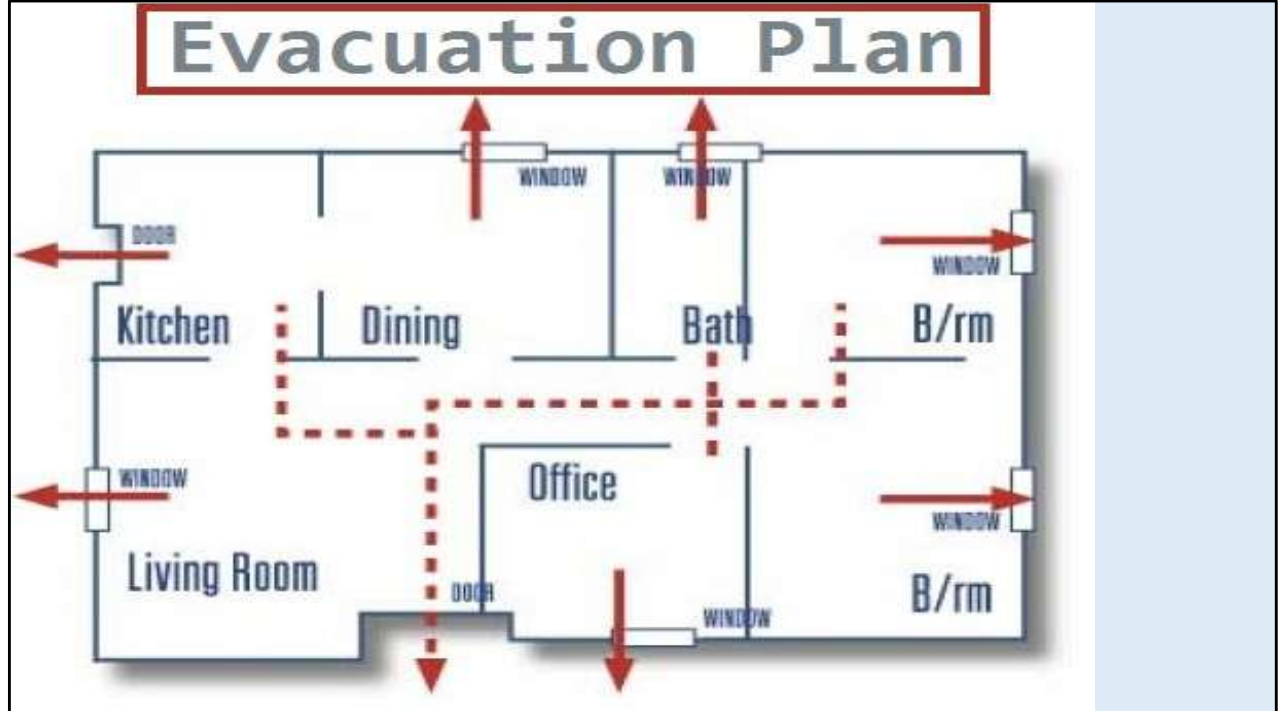
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Our family loves candles, they smell great, offer a warmth to a room, and they also make great gifts. Then you light the candle to enjoy all of this and that little flame, that flickers so nicely is also waiting for the opportunity to jump and become a bigger flame ... maybe even a fire! You need to respect candle flames and control them and not the other way around.

Consider using a battery-operated candle instead of a candle with a wick! Some of those artificial candles will even change colors.

In an emergency, like an earthquake, NEVER USE A CANDLE! That little flame could meet up with a natural gas leak and WHAM! Use a flashlight.

Also NEVER USE a candle around medical oxygen.



If you do have a fire you need to have a plan of 2-ways to get out of each room and out of the house. You need to have a drawing of your home's floor plan. It doesn't have to be exact, draw one by hand showing all rooms, doors and windows. If you have a second floor you need to include a drawing of this floor, as well.

In an emergency, you need to identify TWO Exits per room, if possible. This may be a door or a window. Keep in mind any physical limitation you may have and remember, in an emergency, like a house fire, the speed of getting out is important. If you are upstairs and your path is blocked in getting downstairs, you need to have a plan to get down to ground level.

If you awake to the sound of your smoke alarm, get out NOW and call 911. If you can not get out, close the door to the room with the fire. If you are trapped in the room, stuff wet towels or clothing to seal the cracks to keep out smoke.

Evacuation Plan

- Two ways out of every room; window/door
- Check the door with the back of your hand
- Crawl low under smoke
 - 1 minute from alarm going off to evacuate safely
- Keep all exit routes in home free and clear
- FAMILY MEETING PLACE
- Practice emergency evacuation as often as you test your smoke alarms

What To Do If You Have A Fire



Safety tips:

- Stay calm when the smoke alarm sounds. Get OUT fast-Call 911
- Feel the doorknob and the door. If Hot, DO NOT OPEN and get out another way
- Close doors to stop the spread of fire
- Smoke is poisonous. Get LOW and escape thru your exit
- If trapped, keep door closed and block cracks with wet towels or clothing. Call 911 and let them know where you are.
- With window CLOSED signal for help with flashlight or white cloth

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If you awake to the sound of your smoke alarm, get out NOW and call 911. Remember to stay low in escaping as smoke is poisonous.

If you are in a room with a closed door, feel the doorknob and the back of the door. If it is HOT, DO NOT open the door and get out of the room a different way.

If you can not get out, close the door to the room with the fire. If you are trapped in the room, stuff wet towels or clothing to seal the cracks to keep out smoke. CALL 911 and tell them you are trapped and where you are in the house. Go to a window, KEEP IT CLOSED, and start signaling with a flashlight or white cloth so others can see you.

The installation of smoke alarms and
carbon monoxide detectors.



Senior Smoke Alarm Program

The information on the following slides is provided by the Burn Institute.

Checking Your Pre-existing Smoke Alarms

What to look for:

- **Discoloration;** yellow or off-white alarms are an immediate sign of expiration
- **Expiration date;** add 10 years to the manufacturer date on the back of the alarm
 - Example- 2003 Nov. 17 would expire on **November 17th of 2013**



Check your existing Smoke Detectors. Monthly test the detectors.

About The Alarms

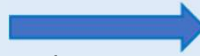
Smoke Alarms

- 10-year built-in lithium-ion battery
- Sits on a base that is screwed into the wall. Activated by twisting it on to base.
- Buttons on front to test/silence alarm.



Carbon Monoxide Detector

- Uses a 9-volt battery that requires replacement.
- Sits on wall with 2 screws. Knee to chest height closest to bedrooms.
- Test/silence button on front of unit.



Installation Guidelines: Location

Smoke alarms are installed in these locations:

Smoke Alarm

- One in every bedroom
 - Above the door
- One in the hallway/common area leading to the bedroom

Carbon Monoxide Detector

- One unit per household
- In hallway closest to the rooms where residents are sleeping
- Between knee and chest height on the wall



Installation Guidelines: Location

First Choice: On the wall above the doorway inside the bedroom



Second Choice: On the ceiling above the doorway inside bedroom

Second Choice: Chest height (if there are small children or pets in the home)

Carbon Monoxide Detector

First Choice: Knee height

Why?

- Our smoke alarms are installed to protect the seniors when they are in their most vulnerable state, sleeping!
- Alarms are installed on the walls for easier access and to avoid seniors getting up on a ladder.



Additional Alarm Information

- Alarms are too sensitive to be installed near kitchens or bathrooms and can be set off by any smoke from cooking and shower steam.
- Do not install alarms near windows/doors to the outside or AC/heater vents.
 - Airflow from units or drafts from the outside can obstruct the function of the alarm.
- Batteries in smoke alarms are BUILT IN this means that the entire unit must be replaced if it is not functioning properly.



Fire Safety and Burn Prevention Tips

Tips

- Keep all matches and lighters in a safe place
- Have an emergency contact!
 - Family member, neighbor, or friend
- Do not leave the stove unattended
- Do not smoke in bed
- Keep all space heaters away from flammable materials and bedding when in use. When not in use turn off and unplug.





Senior Smoke Alarm Program

8825 Aero Drive, #200 San Diego, CA 92123 858-541-2277 ext. 125
smokealarm@burninstitute.org

Senior Smoke Alarm Program Information

The Burn Institute Senior Smoke Alarm Program (SSA) works to improve the chances of a senior to safely escape a home fire by providing and installing working smoke alarms and identifying and evacuation plan.

What do we do?

- Provide and install smoke alarms and CO detectors in senior homes for free.
- Smoke alarms are installed in every bedroom and one on every level of the home plus a CO detector in a hallway or common area closest to all bedrooms in the home.
- Provide home fire safety tips, wild-fire safety tips, home fire prevention, and burn prevention education.
- Give presentations to senior community centers and organizations.
- Host 1-day corporate installation events.
- Work in partnership with local fire departments and the American Red Cross

Who do we serve? What is the cost?

- All seniors who live in San Diego county that meet the age requirement of being 62 and older as well as owning their own home.
- Services are provided free of charge to senior residents meeting the above requirements in San Diego county.

Why refer to us?

- Seniors, ages 65 and older, are twice as likely to die in a home fire than any other segment of the population.
- For seniors older than age 75 the risk of perishing in a home fire nearly quadruples.
- Thousands of seniors in San Diego county reside in homes without a working smoke alarm nor do they have an emergency evacuation plan.
- Many seniors are physically incapable to install their own smoke alarms or lack financial resources to purchase them.

The program consists of the senior contacting the Burn Institute where their information is collected on an intake form. From there they are placed onto a waitlist. The wait can be up to 90 days. Once a route is scheduled and the volunteer installation team is confirmed, the resident is contacted to confirm their availability for a set date and window of time. They will receive a reminder phone call prior to their installation date as well. On the day of the installation volunteers will come into the home and assess and pre-existing smoke alarms in the home, replace and add any additional smoke alarms, and review fire safety and burn prevention education with the senior. If you would like to be put on the Senior Smoke Alarm Program waitlist, please contact the Burn Institute to sign up. The services are confidential and free.

Please contact the Senior Smoke Alarm Program Coordinator at 858-541-2277 x 125 or by email at smokealarm@burninstitute.org

FREE Brochure from FEMA
Fire Safety for Older Adults
FA-221 – October 2018



Print PDF version from the SERT Website:

Use the link below for the pdf version of the brochure that you can view and/or print.

[Safety Tips | sert](#)

Questions & Answers



- Go to a Microphone and wait to be called on
- State your QUESTION in 1-minute or less (NO STORIES!)
 - 1-follow-up question allowed

Copies of this presentation are available on the OHCC SERT
Webpage:
www.ohccsert.com
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Thank You