



Play Training Module

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Household fire prevention

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1. Introduction

Welcome to Household Fire Prevention. During the next 15 minutes you will learn

- how to prevent a fire starting in your household and;
- what to do if a fire does start;

This training is for insurance purposes only. This Training Module is a general course which covers the most important ways to prevent and reduce damage from a household fire. It is not a comprehensive guide and does not ensure compliance with any standards, regulations or statutory obligations and does not cover all conditions, situations, causes or controls.

Rather the module targets the most common and most important issues and concepts, in order to keep the training brief, practical and effective. Please note that effective controls will reduce risk, but will not eliminate it. Risk Management should therefore be seen as an ongoing “Continuous Improvement” process.

For a more information on household fire risks and controls please see the website of the fire department in your state and other appropriate references.

- Section 2 of this Training Module explains why it is important to take household fire risk seriously.
- Section 3 explains the principles of avoiding household fires and identifies the major causes and ways to prevent household fires.
- Section 4 explains how to react if a fire starts.

2. Household fires are serious

Every year there are thousands of household fires in this country, resulting in hundreds of serious injuries and deaths, and millions of dollars in damage. About 80% of all structural fires are in residential properties and more than 1 in 5 people have experienced a fire in their homes. Most of these damaging fires and injuries are easily preventable with a few simple controls and a little bit of knowledge and planning.

3. Avoiding Household Fires

Avoiding most household fires is easy with a few simple precautions. These precautions or controls revolve around one simple principle; keep combustible materials away from things which can start them on fire. This seems simple, but this is how just about every household fire starts.

In order to keep them away from each other lets discuss what things are combustible and what things can start them on fire. Despite what you may think, just about everything in a modern household is combustible. The TV, electronics, carpets, clothes, curtains, couches, beds, chairs, ceilings, fridges and furniture are all mostly combustible. In fact if it is not entirely made of metal or concrete it is probably combustible.

As most household contents are combustible we need to be very careful not to start them on fire. The things that cant potentially start things on fire are called “ignition sources”. From past experience we know that the ignition sources which start the most household fires are cooking on stove tops, smoking, electrical appliances, heaters, lighters, matches and candles. Other ignition sources to be taken seriously are fireplaces and braziers. So in general you need to make sure that these ignition sources are separated from combustible materials.

Now that you have the general idea about how to avoid fires we will point out some of the most important specific situations and controls to watch out for.

- The areas in which most fires start are kitchens, bedrooms and lounges.
- Winter months have more fires than other months. This is generally because of the extra power usage and ignition risks from heaters, electric blankets and fireplaces.
- Cooking is the largest cause of household fires.
- Never leave anything on the stove without being watched (especially oil and fat). Rehearse in you mind how you would put out a fire on the stove.
- Keep curtains, tea towels, and sleeves well away from hot plates and flames.

- Never smoke in bed and never fall asleep while smoking. Always use fire safe ash trays for cigarette ashes and butts and make sure they are extinguished before throwing them away.
- Never overload power points, minimise use of double adapters and be sensible in your use of power boards.
- Make sure there is lots of air spaces around and behind your computer, TV, video and stereo equipment to prevent overheating.
- Never use electrical appliances or cords which are not in good condition. Never make your own electrical repairs. Always call a qualified electrician.
- Don't run cords through areas where they will be damaged, like under walk areas or over sharp or abrasive objects.
- Keep combustible materials away from heaters and always use screens on fireplaces.
- Do not sleep with electric blankets on or leave the house without switching them off. Never use a damaged or overheating electric blanket. Always follow manufacturer's instructions for care and storage.
- Check or replace electric blankets that are over 10 years old. Most electric blankets which cause fires are old.
- Inspect each blanket for wear and tear at the beginning of the cooler months.
- Clean lint filters in clothes dryers every time you use them.
- Never leave a candle unattended and don't put candle close to curtains, paper and other combustibles.
- Lock matches and lighters away out of sight if you have children in the house

One more important factor to be aware of is that people affected by alcohol are much more likely to cause fires and are much more likely to die if a fire starts. This is because they are more likely to fall asleep while smoking or cooking and are less likely to wake up if a fire starts.

4. Detecting and reacting to Household Fires

The next few controls are designed to make you ready to detect, extinguish or evacuate from, a household fire.

If a fire starts you must be ready to detect it and react appropriately. If you can detect a fire early enough you can extinguish the fire while it is still small or you can buy some time to help evacuate safely. There are basically two way to detect a fire. The first way is to notice the fire yourself. The second is a fire detector which can set off an alarm.

A lot of the time the best fire detectors are people. So it is import that when you do things that have a fire risk, that you watch or supervise them and have a plan if things go wrong. For example you should never leave anything on

the stove when you are not watching. You should not leave some heaters on, or candles burning, when you are not in the room.

People are very good fire detectors when awake, but they are very bad fire detectors when they are asleep or not in the area. People who are asleep when a fire starts are often over-come by smoke before they can wake up and save themselves. If no one is in the area, the fire is often too big to extinguish by the time it is noticed. This is why it is so important to have smoke detectors in your home. In most cases when people die in household fires they did not have a functioning fire detector.

Each home should have at least one smoke detector located outside sleeping areas. Placed over the route you would use to escape. If sleeping areas are on different floors or in different parts of the building than each area should have its own smoke detector. The fire department in your State has a website which will give you more information on how and where to install smoke detectors.

When you have a smoke detector you need to test it regularly and change its batteries every year. In a lot of case where people die in a household fires, they had a smoke detector in the house but it did not work because it did not have a battery or the battery was flat.

Testing your smoke detector is very easy. Just push the test button on the detector until it beeps. If it beeps, it is OK. If it doesn't beep the battery is flat or there is some other problem that needs to be fixed. Smoke detectors are so cheap that in most cases it is cheaper and quicker to replace, rather than fix, a smoke detector. You should set up a routine to help you remember when to test your detector. For instance test your detector every time you pay your bills or every time you go shopping. You should replace your battery at least every year. Most States remind you to change your smoke detector battery on April fools day or at the end of daylight savings in March.

When a fire is detected you need to be ready to react appropriately. There are basically two things you can do. Try to put out the fire if it is safe to do so or evacuate to a safe area and inform emergency services.

Because it is not easy to think clearly in an emergency, you should rehearse what you would do if they was a fire in different situations. Maybe by acting it out or maybe by just thinking about what you would do. You will be amazed at how much this will help if you are in an emergency.

If you are going to put out a fire you need to do the right things and you need to do them quickly. In most situations the right type of fire extinguisher and a fire blanket will be a great help. You should consider getting one or both. Fire blankets are good for stove top fires. If you get an extinguisher or a blanket, read the instructions and rehearse how you would use them.

If the fire is on the stove top.

- Turn off the heat.
- Do not try to move burning oil or fat

- Cover the fire with a lid, chopping board or fire blanket
- Or use an extinguisher.
- Remember if you use water on an oil or fat fire the oil could splatter and burn you or spread the fire. So best not to use water on a oil fire.

If it is a gas fire, turn off the gas before trying to put it out.

If it is an electric fire, turn off the power before trying to put it out.

In case you ever have to evacuate, you should always have a rehearsed evacuation plan. Your plan should consider the following:

- Two ways out of the house, if possible.
- When at home, always leave keys in deadlocks or beside the door so they are easy to find.
- How security bars on windows will prevent evacuation
- A safe place to meet outside the house
- Only try to call 000 from inside the house if it is safe to do so. Plan how you could call 000 from outside. For example from a neighbours house.

Please remember these are minimum guidelines only. This training has not been a comprehensive guide and does not ensure compliance with any standards, regulations or statutory obligations and does not cover all conditions, situations, causes or controls. Additional controls should be considered if required.

The fire department in your State has a website which will give you more details of household fire safety such as smoke detectors, fire blankets, extinguishers, evacuation plans, fire hazards and controls. You should consult these websites before buying or installing any fire protection equipment. These websites also provide fire safety checklists to use in your homes.

You may now obtain a certificate which verifies you have completed this training course. We encourage you to present proof of training to your insurance company or broker to demonstrate a proactive approach to risk management. This may reduce your insurance costs.