

Each year, thousands of people are killed or seriously injured due to fires or to violent storms. The seriousness of these threats increase dramatically when our mobility, strength, and vision or perception decline.

The purpose of this information is to help ensure your safety by providing you with facts that let you know exactly what to do should an emergency situation occur. Study this thoroughly and relate the information provided with the layout, exits, and safe locations within your home.

Precautions

Fire Prevention & Protection

Nothing is more devastating or deadly than a home fire. Too frequently, fires occur at night when a prompt escape is delayed due to sleep. Obviously, the best way to protect you and your family from a fire is to prevent a fire.

Here is a good fire prevention checklist to use in your home:

- No open flames around oxygen delivery systems.
- No smoking in bed.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and in the workshop.
- Assure the electrical system is safe and not overloaded.
- Keep stove area free of grease or other flammable materials.
- Keep rubbish and flammable materials in covered metal cans until disposed.

- Carefully extinguish candles used for atmosphere or other purposes.
- Turn off gas or electric room heaters before retiring.
- Keep strike-anywhere (kitchen) matches in a box or other container.
- Protect woodwork that is within 18 inches of a furnace, stove or heater with an insulating shield.
- Keep stoves or heaters a safe distance from curtains or drapes.

Smoke Detectors

Installation

Smoke detectors are simple devices that are easy to install, check and maintain. Install smoke detectors on ceilings or high on walls in two main areas: in any room, such as the kitchen, where a fire may originate; and secondly, in a hallway preferably at the head of a stairway near enough to bedrooms to be heard.

Battery Checks

Check each smoke detector (usually by pressing a button) every 6 months to ensure it is operational. If you are weakened or disabled, have a friend or relative perform this check for you.

Should the detector commence intermittent beeps or provide other indications of a weak battery, replace the battery immediately.

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Escaping a Fire

Guidelines

Escaping a home fire is not always easy, even for family members who are not weak or incapacitated. Many victims are untouched by flame, but are choked by smoke or gases. The only way to be reasonably sure of escaping a fire is to have a plan of escape.

The National Safety Council has established these guidelines but, naturally, you must develop your own escape plan because every home situation is somewhat different.

- Draw a floor plan of your home. On the plan, lay out an escape route for each room on each floor. Have alternate routes where possible, especially for bedrooms, should the planned escape route be blocked by smoke or fire.
- Bedrooms of semi or totally incapacitated individuals should have access to more than one exit route such as a ground level window or easy access to that room from a roof.
- Devise a way to awaken other family members. A whistle by each bed is an excellent emergency alarm.
- Do not waste precious time gathering valuables or getting dressed. Simply get out!
- Keep bedroom doors closed at night to delay the spread of both flames and deadly smoke and gases.
- Test for fire by touching the doorknob. If it is warm or hot, leave the door closed and escape using another route.
- If unable to exit room, stuff wet towels or clothing into door cracks. Stay near a slightly opened window. In a room filled with smoke, cover your nose and mouth with a damp towel and get as low to the floor as possible.

Violent Storms

In many parts of the country, the threat of violent storms is present, at least during certain times of the year. Coastal areas are faced with high winds and rain associated with hurricanes; tornadoes are widespread throughout much of the United States.

In the case of hurricanes, lengthy warnings are usually provided; tornadoes can strike rapidly with little or no warning.

Protection from severe storms usually means getting to a protective shelter, either in the basement or in some cases an external underground structure. But finding adequate shelter in a relatively short period of time can be a near impossible task for the non or semi-ambulatory patient.

The following provides standard precautionary steps followed by special action the patient can take with or without assistance.

- Move in toward the center of the building away from both doors and windows.
- Turn on a portable radio (in case electricity is disrupted) to a station providing you emergency information.
- Provide yourself with a blanket and pillow if readily available.
- If time permits, draw a supply of drinking water, taking a container of water with you to your shelter location.
- Place a chair or move your wheelchair into a protective area such as a large closet.
- Find shelter, if necessary, under beds or a heavy table, again away from windows or doors.
- If a good protective area is not available, sit in a dry bathtub and get down low (not advisable with glass shower doors).