

Wellness

Safety

Major Causes of House Fires and How to Prevent Them

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 Safety

By: Melissa Dittmann Tracey

Homeowners have only three to four minutes to evacuate in the event of a fire, research shows. Share the dangers with your clients to help them prepare and stay safe.

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Deadly house fires are growing in frequency—and many homeowners have less time to get to safety. [Newer homes and furnishings are burning faster](#), research shows, giving owners just three to four minutes to evacuate when a fire breaks out. Thirty years ago, when homes were built to different standards, owners had about 17 minutes to evacuate.

While observing National Fire Prevention Week, which runs through Saturday, fire officials are urging homeowners to take greater precautions. “The number of home fire deaths is going up,” says Steve Kerber, vice president and executive director of the [Fire Safety Research Institute](#). “In just three minutes or less, a room could be more than 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit and filled with deadly levels of toxic gas from the smoke.”

FSRI recommends homeowners take the following precautions:

- **Make an escape plan.** Every household should have a fire escape plan, Kerber says. However, one in three Americans says they do not have one—mostly because they’ve never thought to, according to an FSRI survey. Have a plan A, B and C that identifies two ways to get out of every room. If you cannot escape, plan C should be getting behind a closed door, turning on the light and dialing 911 for help.
- **Check smoke alarms regularly.** Three out of five home fire deaths are attributed to properties without a working smoke detector, according to the [National Fire Protection Agency](#) . Check smoke detectors monthly. Change them out every 10 years. Make sure they are installed in all bedrooms and on all levels of the home, including the basement.
- **Close bedroom doors when sleeping.** FSRI has launched a campaign, “[Close Before You Doze](#) 

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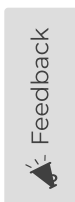


“Smoke inhalation is the leading cause of death in home fires,” Kerber says. “Smoke from a home fire is thick and black, incredibly hot and filled with toxic chemicals. It moves extremely fast. Smoke from a fire in a living room can fill a one-story home or apartment—and everywhere that isn’t blocked by a closed door—in a matter of minutes.”

Cooking is the number one cause of house fires and was behind about 50% of them from 2015 to 2019, according to the NFPA. Many of those fires involved a stove and people walking away from the food while still cooking. Fire officials say that there are only about 30 to 45 seconds to react before a fire can quickly get out of hand.

Another leading cause of house fires is heating equipment, particularly space heaters. The NFPA urges homeowners to turn off portable heaters whenever leaving a room or sleeping. Also, space heaters should be kept at least three feet away from furniture, bedding or other flammable items.

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