

Fire Safety Week

In the ten year period 1993 to 2002, 482 people died in fires in Ireland. Over 60% of these deaths occurred during the night, when people were overcome by fumes while sleeping. Most fatal fires have a tendency to happen during the winter months. To date 29 people have died in fires in 2005 in Ireland.

There are three Golden Rules to follow to ensure your home is fire safe:

- Prevention - Assess your home and eliminate fire hazards
- Protection - Install smoke alarms to give you an early warning
- Planning - Plan and perfect an escape drill with your family



Prevention

Every fire has a cause and most often there's a common sense, simple method of prevention. Carelessness with regard to open fireplaces, heaters, cookers, electric blankets and smoking are the leading causes of fire deaths and injuries. The risk of a fire breaking out can be greatly reduced by carrying out a few simple steps before going to bed each night.

- Switch off all gas and electrical equipment and unplug any appliances not in use before going to bed
- Place a spark guard in front of open fire places
- Close the doors of all rooms in the home
- Check that all cigarette butts are safely extinguished and never ever smoke in bed
- Make sure all escape routes such as corridors, stairs and hallways are clear of obstacles



Protection

Installing smoke alarms in the home will greatly enhance the chances of detecting a fire should one break out while sleeping. The average smoke alarm costs around €12, a small price to pay for peace of mind. When buying a smoke alarm ensure that it conforms to one of the following standards, Irish Standard IS 409 of 1998 or British Standard BS 5446. Some smoke alarms now on the market come with a ten year battery (lithium battery). These alarms are designed to be replaced as a whole unit thus avoiding the need for battery replacement. They cost a little extra but are well worth it.

Two smoke alarms, properly located on the ceiling, should suit the average home. Larger homes will require more. In houses of more than one story in height install a smoke alarm on each level. Position smoke alarms where they can be clearly heard from key positions in your home e.g. from behind the closed door of a bedroom.

If smoke alarms are already installed in the home they should be tested, once per week, to ensure they are in good working order. All smoke alarms have a test button which should be used to check that they are operational. If the alarm fails to sound check the battery. If this is not the problem check the manufacturer's instructions. If in any doubt purchase a new alarm.

Planning

Often, when a fire breaks out, confusion and errors follow. If you have a well-practiced fire evacuation drill you will be better able to deal with an emergency situation. A rehearsed fire escape drill can make all the difference:

- Family members should plan two escape routes to get out if the house
- Decide on one meeting point outside the house
- Practice the plan until perfect
- Close all doors behind you as you leave
- The stairs are the primary escape route - keep them clear
- Do not re-enter the house for any reason
- Phone the fire brigade from a nearby outside phone



Please see below for a Home Fire Safety Checklist

HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKLIST		
PRE-FIRE PLANNING	YES	NO
Have you planned at least two ways to get out of every room in your home?		
Do you keep exit routes clear in your home?		
Do you know how to notify your fire department quickly and correctly in case of fire?		
ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN	YES	NO
Do you make it a rule never to leave small children alone or unattended?		
Do your babysitters (<i>and you</i>) know the first rule of safety in fire emergencies? —Get everybody out fast, and don't go back in.		
Do you show your babysitters the escape routes from your home, and give instructions on the correct way to report a fire?		
GOOD SMOKING HABITS	YES	NO
Is smoking in bed strictly against the rule in your home?		
Do you always make sure that cigarette, cigar and pipe ashes are completely extinguished before you dispose of them? Before going to bed, be SURE there are no cigarettes still burning.		
Are matches kept out of the reach of children?		
HEATING AND COOKING	YES	NO
Are furnaces & stoves kept in good repair and located far enough away from combustible walls and ceilings so that they do not create a hazard? Use a fireplace screen to prevent sparks from flying.		
If you have portable space heaters in your home do you see that they are properly maintained and located? Keep portable space heaters away from people, curtains, and furniture.		
Do you have an annual inspection of your heating system? Have heating equipment checked and cleaned each year.		
Can you stop a cooking fire safely? Smother a pan fire with a lid. Never use water. If cooking oil starts to smoke, turn down the heat. Don't throw whatever's handy on the counter, such as dumping flour from the bag, on the fire (<i>explosion!</i>)		
ELECTRICITY	YES	NO
Do you see that extension cords are never run under rugs or hooked over nails? Avoid using extension cords wherever possible (<i>especially small-wired cords use with high-wattage appliances.</i>)		
When the breaker "trips" or a fuse blows, do you investigate WHY it happened? If a fuse blows (<i>or a breaker "trips"</i>), find the cause. Remove excess appliances (<i>lamps, stereo components, space heaters, etc.</i>) from a breaker circuit that frequently "trips".		
Is the right size fuse (<i>20 amps for lighting circuits</i>) in each socket in the fuse box? Replace the fuse with one of the correct size.		
Is your TV well ventilated? Allow air space around the TV to prevent overheating. If it doesn't work right, it can be a fire danger.		
GOOD HOUSEKEEPING	YES	NO
Do you keep rubbish cleaned out of the attic, basement, closets, garage and yard? Sort and remove rubbish. Don't store things near the furnace or heater.		
Are gasoline and other flammable liquids stored in safety cans, and kept well away from both heat and children? Move flammable liquids away from heat. Do not store flammable liquids in the home. Keep them stored outside and away from the house in a separate storage building. Don't fill a hot lawn mower or other motor; let it cool first.		