



**American  
Red Cross**

of Greater Indianapolis

# Prevent home fires

The most common disaster in central Indiana is the single-family fire. A residential fire can be devastating, with consequences ranging from the loss of possessions and keepsakes to the unthinkable — injury or death of a family member.

Home fires kill more Americans each year than all natural disasters combined. But fire doesn't have to be deadly if you have early warning from a smoke alarm and everyone in your family knows how to escape calmly.



*Photo credit: Indianapolis Fire Department*

## Fire prevention

- Keep all sources of fuel (paper, clothing, bedding and carpets or rugs) at least three feet away from all heat sources when cooking, or using alternative heating like a space heater.
- Don't leave the kitchen while frying, grilling or broiling food and don't leave home while cooking.
- Use only one plug in each electrical outlet. Keep electrical appliances, sockets and cords away from water.
- If you must use an extension cord, use one rated for the appliance it's powering. Check the ratings on the cord and on the equipment or lights. Never run extension cords under carpets or flooring.
- Encourage people to smoke outdoors only.
- If someone smokes indoors, provide large, deep ashtrays. Make sure all smoking materials are extinguished before leaving the room. Check upholstered furniture for ashes that could be smoldering and cause a fire later.
- Never smoke in bed. Bed linens are highly combustible.

- Keep matches and lighters away from and out of reach of children.
- Never leave burning candles unattended.
- Keep flammable liquids such as gasoline or kerosene in appropriately marked safety containers outdoors, preferably in a locked shed. If they must be stored indoors, keep them away from any source of flame such as a hot water heater or furnace.
- Have heating systems, chimneys and flues checked by a professional once a year to make sure they're in proper working order.
- Use flashlights for emergency lighting if you lose power. Don't use candles.

## Fire preparedness

- Have at least one working fire extinguisher in your home. Get training from the fire department on how to use it. Make sure it's properly charged, and repair or replace damaged or corroded units.
- Install carbon monoxide (CO) alarms following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Determine two ways to escape from every room in your home.

- Consider escape ladders for sleeping areas on the second and third floors. Learn how to use them and store them near windows.
- Burglar bars and locks that block outside window entry must be easy to open from the inside.
- Select a location outside your home — a safe distance from heat, smoke and flames—where everyone would meet after escaping.
- Teach family members to get out first, and then call for help from outside using a cell phone, pay phone or a neighbor’s phone.
- Teach children that it’s a firefighter’s job—not theirs — to rescue people and pets. Their job is to get out quickly and stay out.
- Conduct a home fire drill at least twice a year with your entire family. Practicing your escape plan will make your actions more automatic—requiring less thinking and saving precious time.

### **If you’re in a fire**

- If you see smoke or fire in your first escape route, use your second route. If you have to exit through smoke, crawl low under the smoke to the nearest exit.
- If you’re escaping through a closed door, feel the door before opening it. If the door is warm, use your second route.
- Close doors behind you as you escape to slow the spread of the fire.
- If smoke, heat or flames block your exit routes, stay in the room with the door closed. Signal for help using a brightly colored cloth at the window. Open a window for ventilation, but be prepared to close it if smoke enters from the outside.
- If your clothes catch on fire, **STOP** where you are, **DROP** to the ground and **ROLL** over and over to smother the flames.
- Once you’re outside, stay out. If the fire department hasn’t been called, do so from a cell phone or a neighbor’s home.

- Wait at the designated spot for fire officials. Be prepared to answer questions about the location of the fire, missing family members and pets, possible fire hazards and other conditions.

### **Smoke alarms save lives**

Install smoke alarms outside each sleeping area, inside each bedroom and on each level of your home according to manufacturer’s instructions and in accordance with local codes.

- There are two types of smoke alarms. Ionization smoke detection is more responsive to flaming fires; photoelectric smoke detection is more responsive to smoldering fires. Research is ongoing and standards change, but for your best protection, install both types or alarms that combine both types of technology.
- Hard wire or use wireless broadcast technology to interconnect your smoke alarms so that a fire detected by one alarm will sound at each alarm location, providing an early warning system and more time to escape. Hardwired alarms will need battery backups and should be installed by a professional electrician.
- Test smoke alarms once a month and replace batteries as needed.
- *Reset clocks; replace batteries.* Make it a habit to replace alarm batteries when you reset your clocks for daylight saving time.
- Smoke alarms become less sensitive over time. Replace your smoke alarms every 10 years.
- Vacuum cobwebs and dust from your smoke alarms monthly.
- Teach children what the smoke alarm sounds like, and what they should do when they hear it.
- If a smoke alarm goes off every time you cook, don’t disable it – move it farther away or purchase one with a “hush” button.
- For more information visit the National Fire Protection Association’s Web Site at [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).