



Where There is Smoke, There is Fire: Protect the Seniors in Your Life

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Fires can be devastating destroying treasured items, necessities and often lives. Escaping a fire is difficult enough when you are able bodied, but imagine being bed-ridden, having a hearing loss or other medical issues. More than 1200 Americans 65 and over die annually from a fire-related event, and more than 25% of all fire deaths and one-third of all residential fire death occur in this age group. The number of fire deaths increases as we age. Seniors 65 and older have nearly twice the national average for fire deaths. That number jumps to three times the national average for those age 75 and older and four times the national average for individuals 85+.

. Here are some more sobering statistics:

- One fifth of individuals greater than 65 years of age that die in fires are bedridden or challenged by some other physical disability.
- Two-thirds of older persons that died in fires were in the rooms where the fire originated.
- While the leading cause of death in fire-related deaths for seniors is careless smoking, the leading cause of injuries is cooking related. Seniors also sustain injuries from scalds or burns due to space heater, fireplace, and wood stove malfunctions, as well as faulty wiring and overloaded outlets.

Be Prepared

As the Boy Scouts say: Always be prepared. You can prevent fire-related accidents with some simple easy-to-follow tips.

While in the kitchen:

- Never leave food unattended on the stove.
- Use potholders, not towels, to handle hot pans and dishes.
- Wear short or close-fitting sleeves and an apron to avoid catching clothes on fire.
- Keep a pot lid close by to smother any pan fires.
- Clean the stove and toaster regularly to avoid grease and crumb buildup.

When using heat sources:

- Don't use your oven to heat your home.
- Keep curtains and other flammable items at least a foot away from a heat source.

- Keep electrical appliances and heaters unplugged when not using them.
- Never hang clothes near a heat source
- Don't leave portable heaters on when you are not home or asleep

When smoking:

- Stay alert. Don't smoke when you are about to doze off or are in bed.
- Make sure all embers are out in the ashtray before emptying it into the trash.

Bedtime Safety Check

To play it safe, do a safety check before retiring for the evening. Here are some suggestions:

- Turn off stoves burners, oven, space heaters, and any other heat sources.
- Keep your robe, slippers, eyeglasses, and house keys close at hand either on the nightstand by your bed or in a container close to your bed.
- Close your bedroom door while sleeping.
- Install a smoke and carbon monoxide detector on every level of your home or apartment. Check the smoke alarm on a monthly basis.
- Plan your escape route.
- Know the location of the stairways.
- Stay out of elevators.
- Put a 9-1-1 sticker on your phone to remind you of the number or program it into your cell phone.

Fires can start in seconds and can destroy precious lives. Don't take chances with yourself or your loved ones. Post the above suggestions and look at them often. Be prepared, be safe and stay well.