

Fire and Burn Safety for Senior Citizens



State of New Jersey

Christopher Christie, Governor

Department of Community Affairs

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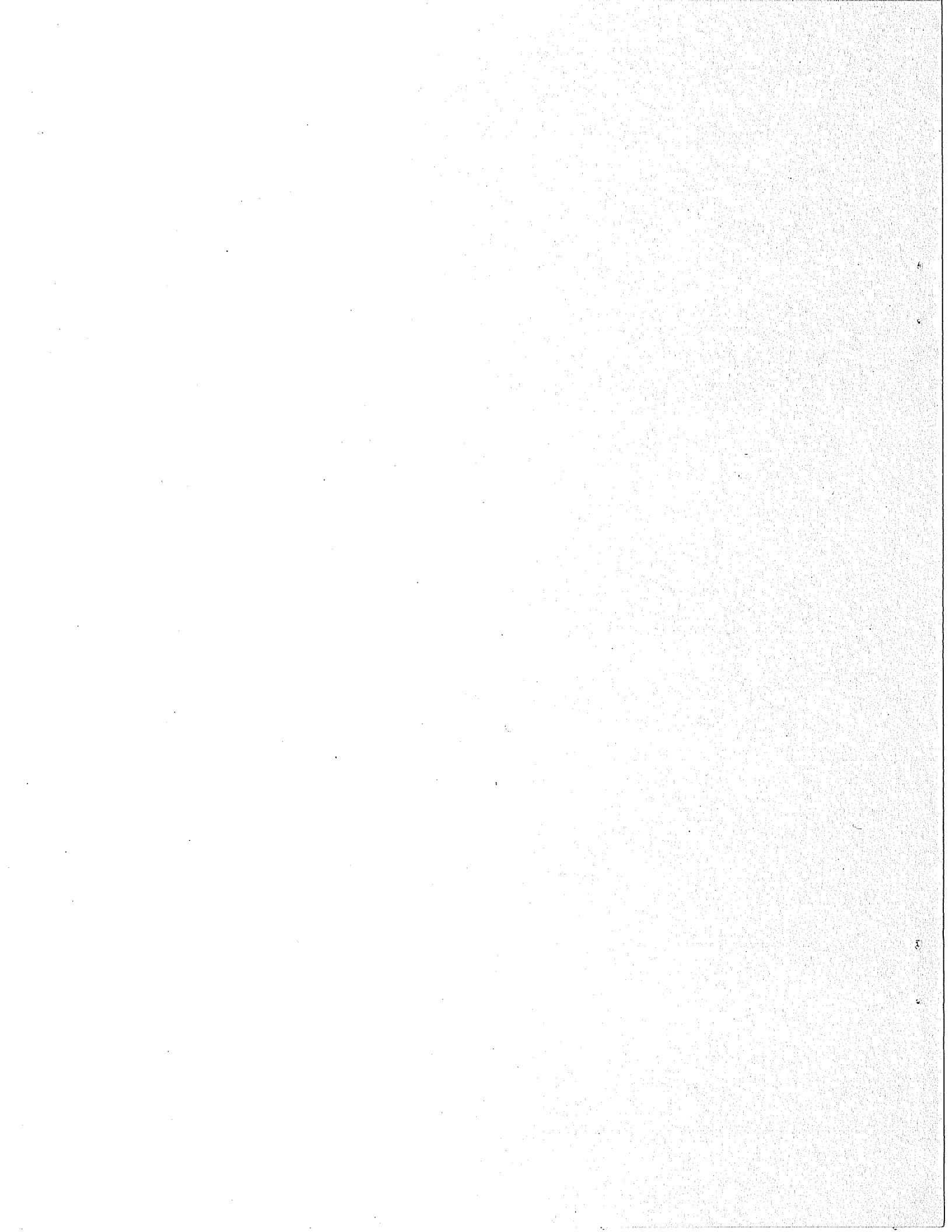
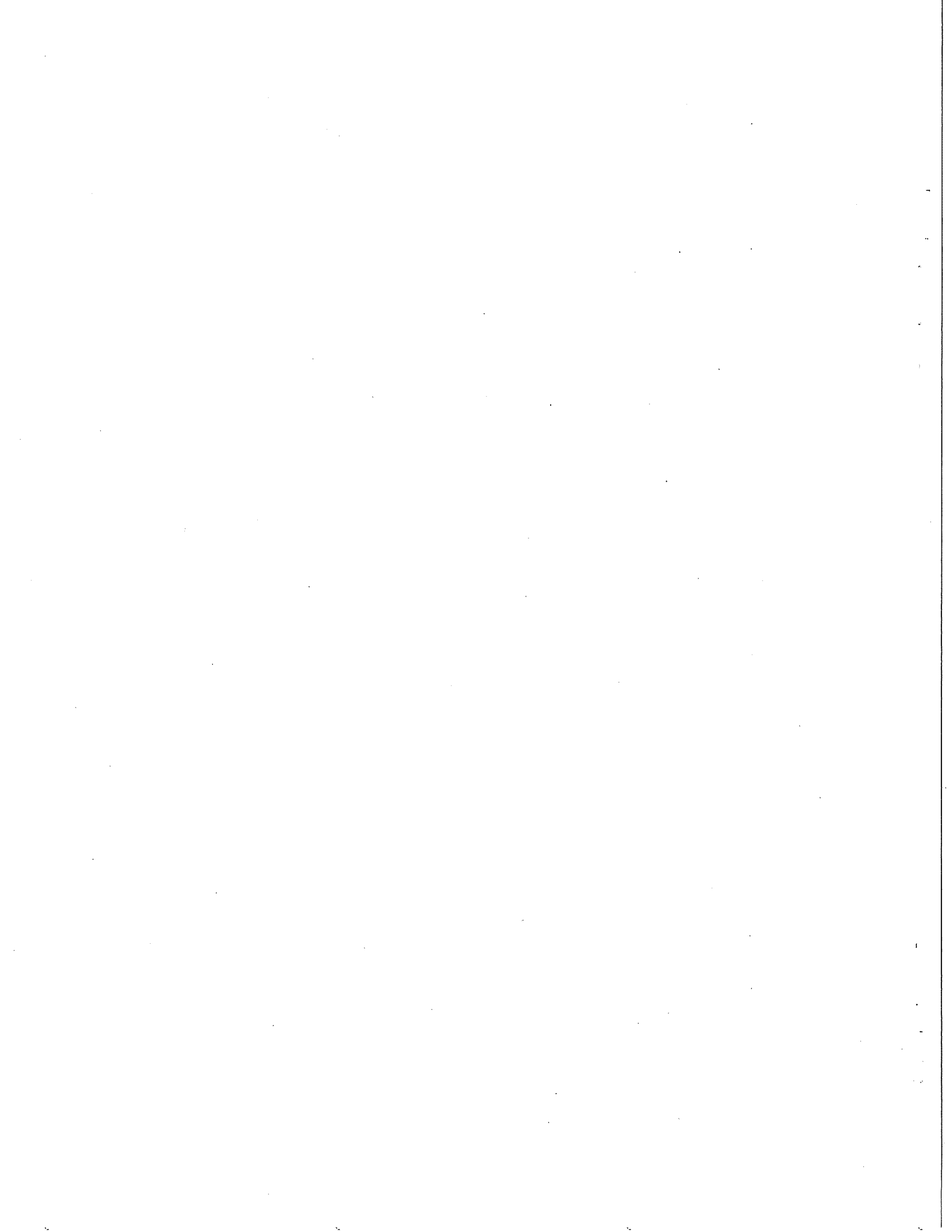


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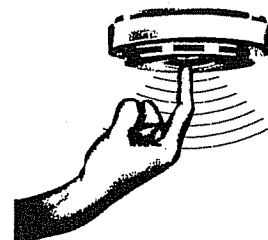


Smoke Detectors: Protectors of the Elderly

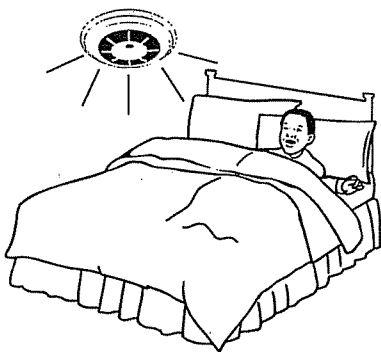
Smoke detectors are the most effective low-cost fire protection devices you can buy. Every home should have a smoke detector on every level and outside each sleeping area.

Properly installed, positioned and maintained smoke detectors double your chances of surviving an accidental house fire.

When a smoke detector detects smoke from a fire, they sound a loud, piercing alarm which instantly alerts you, or awakens you to the danger of fire if you're asleep. Your chances of survival are increased because your detector provides you with an early warning, extra time to escape, and additional time for the fire department to save your property!



Many people **MISTAKENLY** believe that if they ever had a fire, they would be awakened by the smell of smoke in time to escape. Nothing could be further from the truth!

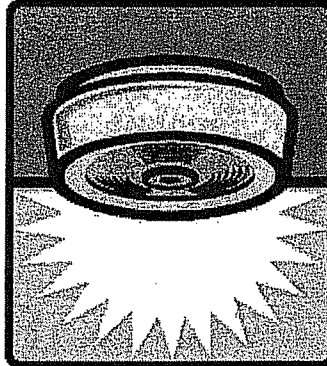


Smoke from a fire contains carbon monoxide, which disorients people, dulls their senses, and makes them lose consciousness. If you are already asleep, it puts you into a **DEEPER** sleep, and can eventually kill you! This is a big reason why most people die of smoke inhalation in home fires rather than from burns.

The peak time for home fire fatalities is between midnight and 8 AM - when most people are asleep. You **NEED** a smoke detector to wake you up if you ever have a fire at night. Every home should have at least one smoke detector on every level of the home.

For additional protection, place a detector in the hallway outside bedroom areas; inside every bedroom where a smoker sleeps; inside rooms where portable heaters are being used; and inside bedrooms where people sleep with the doors closed. Smoke detectors should generally be installed on the ceiling, as close to the center as possible. Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for correct installation procedures.

To prevent nuisance alarms, install detectors at least 20 feet away from kitchens, furnaces, hot water heaters and space heaters. If a nuisance alarm does go off (from burning toast, for example), just take a magazine or newspaper and fan the detector until the alarm stops.



**Smoke detectors save lives!
Never disconnect a smoke detector or remove its batteries!**

Test Your Smoke Detectors at Least Once a Month

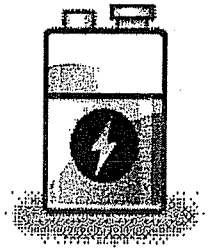
Like any other electro-mechanical device, smoke detectors are subject to breakdown and failure as they age. This is why it is important to test your detectors on a monthly basis to be sure that they are still protecting you.

To test your detector, press and hold down the detector's test button for several seconds. If you can't reach it, you can use a broom handle to depress its test button. If the alarm beeps after you've depressed and held the test button, then you know that your smoke detector is working properly.

It's also important to remember that smoke detectors don't last forever. *Consumer Reports* magazine recommends replacing all smoke detectors that are more than 10 years old, even if they appear to be working properly. So if your smoke detectors are 10 years old or older, replace them with new ones as soon as you can. It will be one of the best investments you'll ever make.

Be Sure to Maintain Your Smoke Detectors

A smoke detector that doesn't work is worse than having no smoke detector at all. To keep your smoke detector working as your guardian against fire, you should make sure that you change the batteries in your detectors when required.

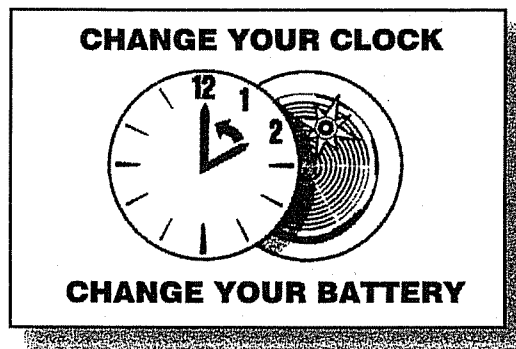


If you hear your smoke detector make a “chirping” sound, its battery is low and should be replaced immediately!

It is a good idea to change your smoke detector's batteries when clocks change back from daylight savings time each fall.

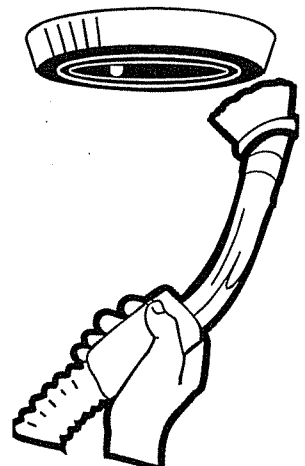
Just remember:

Change Your Clock, Change Your Battery!

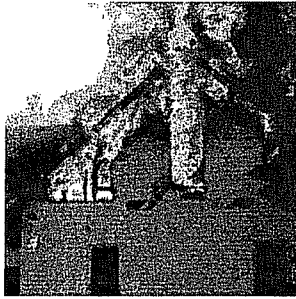


Immediately after installing a fresh battery, make sure that you installed it correctly by pressing the test button for a few seconds. If the alarm sounds, then you're okay. If it doesn't, make sure that the battery contacts were seated properly. Get someone to help you if necessary.

Also, vacuum the grill on your smoke detector's cover about once a month to remove dust and cobwebs, which can affect your detector's sensitivity and prevent it from doing its job.



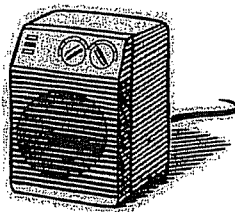
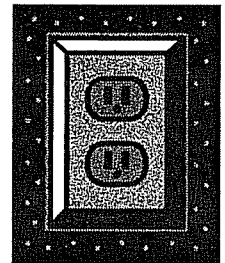
Protect Yourself from Fire



Your home is your castle - but it can be dangerous if you don't take precautions. In the United States, fire strikes a home about once every minute, and more than 75% of all fire deaths occur in home fires.

Don't give fire a chance to strike your home. The following are some very simple and easy things you can do immediately to prevent a fire from starting:

- * **DON'T** leave food cooking unattended on the stove. If you **MUST** leave the kitchen, turn the stove burner(s) **OFF** and move hot pots or pans to a cool area on the stovetop.
- * **DON'T** overload electrical outlets, but **DO** make sure that your plugs and outlets are in good condition. Plug only one appliance into each electrical receptacle, and never run electrical cords under carpets. Remember that extension cords are for temporary usage only.
- * **DON'T SMOKE CARELESSLY, AND NEVER SMOKE IN BED!**
It's too easy to get drowsy and fall asleep while smoking! Don't smoke in a comfortable chair, either. There's a chance you might doze off.
- * **DON'T** wear clothing with long, loose sleeves that will hang over stovetop burners while you are cooking.
- * **DON'T** operate portable heaters near anything that might catch on fire.



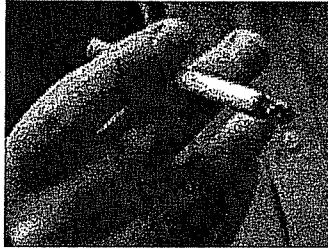


- * **DO** test your smoke detectors regularly to make sure that they work properly.
- * **DO** set the thermostat on your water heater to 120 degrees. Many people set them to higher temperatures, which heats water enough to cause serious burns.
- * **DO** plan on how you would escape from your home if you ever have a fire. Figure out two ways of getting out of every room in the house, just in case the fire prevents you from leaving by your usual way.
- * **DO** remember that if a fire starts in your home, you should get yourself and everyone else out of the house immediately, call **911** from a neighbor's telephone, and not go back inside a burning house for any reason.

**NEVER GO BACK INSIDE A BURNING HOUSE
FOR ANY REASON!!!**



Are You a Smoker?



The leading cause of fire fatalities is accidental house fires started by the careless use of smoking materials.

About a thousand people die each year in fires started by the use of smoking materials -- matches, lighters and cigarettes.

**Don't Place Your Life In Danger
By Smoking Carelessly!!!**

Falling asleep while smoking is the most common cause of serious burn injury to the elderly, and often results in fatalities. It doesn't take much imagination to figure out how this happens.

Typically, the older smoker is tired, fatigued, and sometimes under the influence of alcohol or medication. He or she sits down in a comfortable upholstered chair, lights up a cigarette, and turns on the TV. After a little while, they begin to feel drowsy, and then fall asleep. The cigarette falls from their hand onto their lap, the chair, or the rug. Or, the cigarette may have been placed in an ashtray on the arm of the chair, and when the smoker falls asleep, he knocks the ash tray over without ever waking up. A smoldering cigarette may burn for hours, and can ignite combustibles such as clothing, upholstery, the rug, newspapers or draperies.

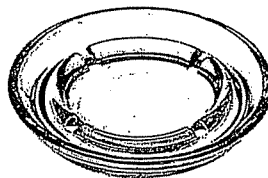


- Don't smoke when you are tired, drowsy, drinking, or taking medication that makes you sleepy.
- Install smoke detectors in every room used by smokers.
- Dispose of cigarette butts properly. Make absolutely sure that all smoking materials have been extinguished and have cooled off before disposing of them.
- Use only safe ashtrays.

What is a safe ashtray?

Safe ashtrays are large and stable, not easy to tip over accidentally, and have a central island for burning cigarettes so that the cigarettes cannot fall out of the ashtray if they are unattended.

Safe ashtrays make excellent gifts for smokers.



Cooking Safely



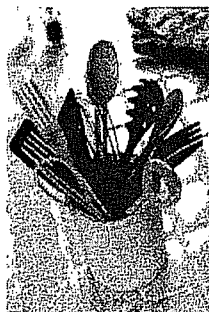
The most dangerous place of all in the kitchen is the area around the stove.

Cooking grease and oils can ignite, and so can combustible materials around the stove, such as paper towels, cereal boxes, potholders, etc. Loose clothing, especially hanging sleeves, could brush up against stove burners and cause a serious clothing fire. You must be very careful in the kitchen, particularly when using the stove.

**Cooking Is the Leading Cause Of Home Fires.
BUT - Cooking Fires Are Preventable**

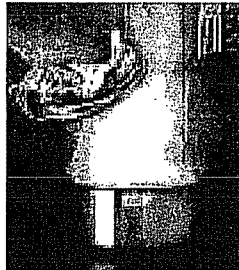
TO PREVENT A COOKING FIRE IN YOUR KITCHEN:

- * Stay in the kitchen while you cook. You'll be safer (and less likely to burn your dinner). If you have to leave the kitchen, turn off the heat.
- * Keep the stove area clear of anything flammable, such as food containers, cloth and paper towels, potholders, your cookbook, etc.
- * Wear short sleeves, or sleeves that fit snugly around your arms. Loose clothing is far more likely to catch on fire. Loose sleeves should be rolled back or fastened with pins or elastic bands while cooking.



- * Keep a large lid nearby, which can be used to extinguish the flames in a burning pot or pan if necessary; and consider learning to use a portable fire extinguisher, which is capable of putting out a small kitchen fire. (Check with your local fire department for advice on what kind of extinguisher to buy and for instructions on how to use it.) Also, follow the instructions that come with the extinguisher.
- * When using pots and pans, turn their handles inward, toward the center of the stove, so it's less likely that anyone will pull or accidentally knock them over. A falling piece of hot cookware could easily result in painful burns, so turn handles inward, away from danger.
- * When cooking, heat oil or grease slowly and watch them constantly until you are finished.

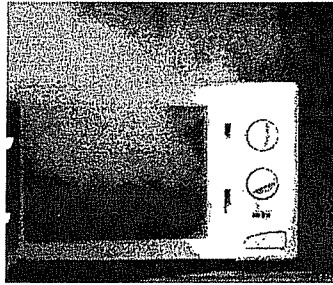
What To Do If A Fire Starts



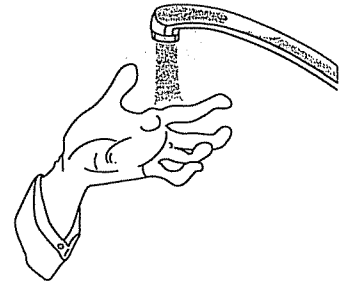
- * If a fire starts in a pan on the stovetop, carefully place a lid over the burning pan, turn off the burner, and place the pan on a cool area of the stove.

NEVER POUR WATER ON AN OIL OR GREASE FIRE.

- * If a fire starts inside the oven, turn off the heat and keep the oven door closed to suffocate the flames. Call the fire department if the fire does not go out immediately.



- * If a fire starts inside your microwave oven, keep the door shut and push the stop button. Leave the door closed until the fire is out. If the fire does not go out immediately, call the fire department.
- * If your clothing catches on fire, **DO NOT RUN**. Running will make the fire spread faster. **STOP** where you are, **DROP** to the ground, and **ROLL** back and forth to extinguish the flames. Cover your face with your hands while rolling. This is called **STOP, DROP & ROLL**.
- * If you burn yourself while cooking, run **COOL** (not cold) water over the burn. **NEVER PUT BUTTER OR OINTMENT ON A BURN - it will only make it worse.** If you are burned badly, see a doctor.
- * If your fire is small, use your fire extinguisher on it if you are able. But if you can't use an extinguisher, and the fire gets out of control, get yourself and others out of the house as quickly as possible and call 911 for help from a neighbor's house. **Never go back inside a burning house for any reason.**



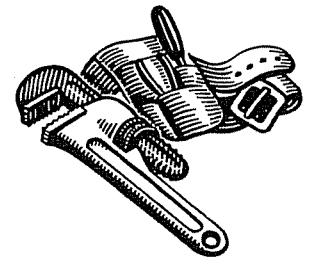
Heating Your Home Safely



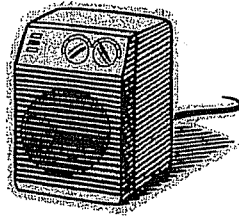
There are more home fires during the months of December, January and February than at any other time of the year. That's because heating equipment fires are the number one cause of home fire deaths during the winter months. Tens of thousands of home heating fires kill hundreds of people, on the average, every year.

The good news is that most of these fires are preventable - it's just a matter of taking the steps that are necessary to avoid them.

- * If you live in your own home, have your heating system inspected and cleaned by a trained professional **BEFORE** the start of each heating season.
- * Heaters generate heat - so don't place anything that can burn near them. Leave at least 5 feet of space around them, just to be on the safe side.
- * When wood burns, creosote can build up in chimneys and can cause a fire. If you have a fireplace and use it, have the chimney inspected and cleaned by a professional prior to the start of every heating season. Always have a screen over the fireplace when you are using it.



Things To Watch Out For When Using Portable Heaters



More and more people are using portable heaters, and as the use of these heaters increases, so does the potential for hazards. If you are one of the people who use a device commonly described as a “space heater,” “room heater,” “auxiliary heater,” “area heater,” or “portable heater,” you’ll be far safer, as well as warmer, if you make sure that you have a smoke detector in the room in which your portable heater is used.

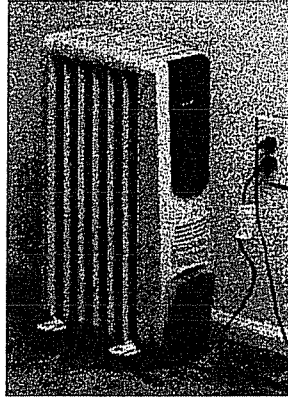
And if your heater uses fuel, such as kerosene, wood or coal, you should know that fuel-fired heaters pose the additional threat of carbon monoxide poisoning. These kinds of heaters should only be used in conjunction with a smoke detector **AND** a carbon monoxide detector. Both types of detectors can be purchased inexpensively at most hardware stores.

The safest space heaters to use are radiant electric heaters that have no exposed heating elements. Their surface temperatures are lower, and they pose none of the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning associated with fuel-fired portable heaters.

Tips For Using Portable Heaters:

- * **The use of kerosene heaters is illegal in many New Jersey municipalities.** Before purchasing one, make sure that they are legal for use in your town. And even if your town does allow them, state law permits their use only in one- and two-family homes. They can be extremely dangerous if not used correctly.
- * Don’t purchase an electric heater unless it has the label of an independent testing laboratory (such as UL), a tipover switch that will cut off power to the unit if it is knocked over, and a grill to keep fingers and flammables away from heating elements.

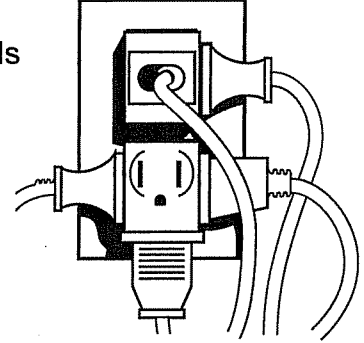




- * Read and follow all instructions for operating the heater.
- * Place portable heaters well away from all flammable materials such as curtains, drapes, newspapers, rugs and furniture.
- * Keep electric heaters (and all other electrical appliances) away from water, and never touch them if you are wet.
- * Be sure that the plug of the electrical cord is in good condition and fits snugly into the outlet. A loose plug can overheat. If the heater's power cord is frayed, have it replaced by a professional electrical technician. If the cord or plug feels too hot to the touch while the heater is operating, shut off the heater and unplug it.
- * Turn off the heater when you go to sleep or leave the room.

Electrical Wiring & Appliances

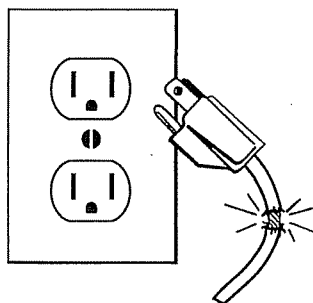
Many older homes have few electrical outlets, or outlets at inconvenient places. This situation can create home fire hazards by encouraging the use of extension cords and overloaded outlets. An outlet becomes overloaded when the appliances connected to them are drawing more electrical current than the outlet can handle. When this happens, wiring can get hot and radiate enough heat to walls, paneling, etc. to cause a fire.

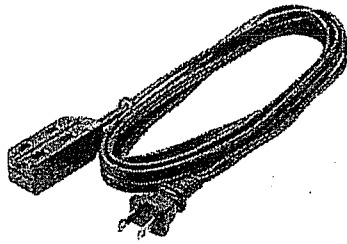


To eliminate these risks:

- * If you don't have enough electrical outlets in your home, have a professional licensed electrician rewire your home and add more.
- * If rewiring isn't possible, limit the number of appliances you connect to each outlet. Plug in no more than one electrical appliance to each electrical receptacle.

Electrical cords on appliances should be examined regularly for signs of wear. Too often, we tend to take these cords for granted and use them without ever checking them. Inspect your cords. If cords are frayed or cracked, have them replaced by a qualified electrical technician immediately.

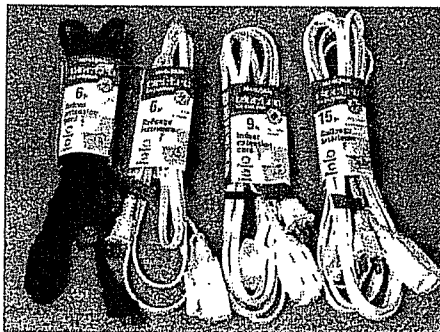




**Don't use extension cords if you don't have to.
But if you MUST use them:**

1. **Never run extension cords under rugs or carpets.** When extension cords are run under a carpet, walking over the rug can wear the cord's insulation away, expose the wires, and possibly start a fire.
2. **Purchase only UL-approved extension cords that are capable of handling the electrical loads they are used for.** Never use thin extension cords with heavy appliances. Light extension cords are not capable of safely handling the current requirements of large appliances.
3. Extension cords can also fray, crack and wear out, and when they do, they become fire and electrical shock hazards.

**Inspect the condition of your extension cords.
If any are defective, get rid of them!**



Be Prepared For Fire - Have An Escape Plan

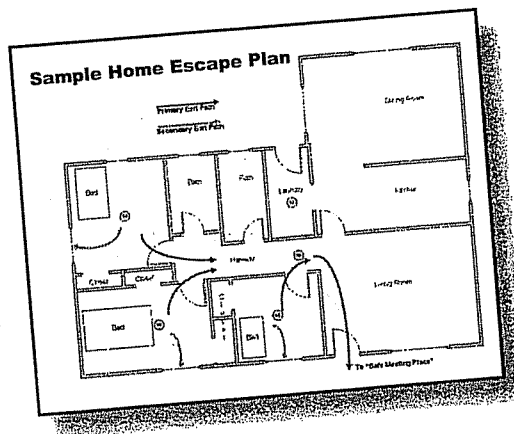


*If Fire Breaks Out In Your Home,
Will You Be Able To Get Out In Time?*

Having a smoke detector in your home cuts your risk of dying in a home fire in half. But you can do even better than that. You can develop and practice a home escape plan and increase your chances of escaping from a fire without injury ***EVEN MORE***. Practicing how you would escape from a fire ***BEFORE*** it strikes will enable you to get out faster, with less panic.

In a real fire, the smoke is thick and black - you can't see through it - and the toxic gases in it can confuse you. **BUT** - if you've practiced how you would escape from your home, and you know two ways out of every room in your home, you will know the drill by heart and can get out quickly even after you've been exposed to disorienting smoke.

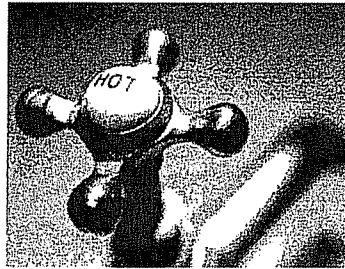




Other Steps You Can Take:

- * Check to make sure that no windows are painted or locked shut; that no furniture blocks any exit door; and that no locks are too difficult to open quickly. Locked doors and windows should be able to be unlocked quickly and easily so they can't trap you inside your home if you have a fire. Remove obstacles to escape **BEFORE** you have a fire. You won't have time to struggle with a stuck window or move heavy furniture to clear your escape path in a real emergency.
- * When practicing your escape plan, review how you would call 911 for emergency help from a neighbor's phone.
- * As part of your escape plan, establish a meeting place outside where you and all other members of your family can wait for the fire department.
- * Once outside, **STAY OUTSIDE, AND NEVER RETURN TO A BURNING BUILDING.**

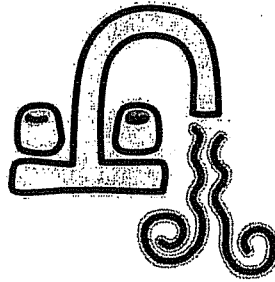
Preventing Burn and Scald Injuries



Scald injuries (burns caused by hot liquids) are the second most common type of burn injury, and account for more than 30% of all burn center admissions. Here are tips for avoiding scalds:

- * Set the thermostat on your water heater to 120 degrees F or lower. At 160 degrees, it takes less than one second to get a third degree burn. It's almost impossible to burn yourself if your water is 120 degrees or lower. If you're unable to lower the thermostat temperature yourself, have a plumber or your landlord do it for you.
- * Special antiscald faucets and showerheads are available. You might want to consider having them installed.
- * Textured non-slip strips and mats and grab-bars for tubs and showers make it less likely that you will slip or fall.
- * Keep hot foods and liquids away from the edges of tables and countertops.
- * Test the temperature of food and drinks before serving.
- * Be careful when removing lids. Steam burns can result.
- * Allow microwaved foods to cool before removing them from the oven.

What To Do if You Burn Yourself

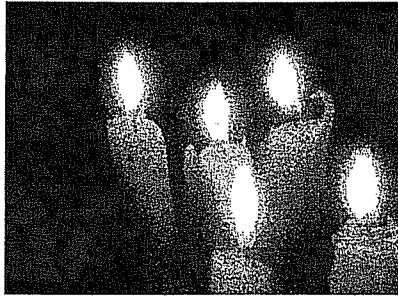


The way you respond to a burn during the first few minutes after it occurs can make a big difference in how serious the burn becomes. To minimize the severity of burns:

- * **Stop The Burning Process.** Remove the source of heat. If your clothing has caught fire, **Stop, Drop & Roll** to smother the flames.
- * **Remove All Burned Clothing.** If clothing sticks to the burned skin, cut the clothing around the burn area to avoid damaging good skin tissue.
- * **Run cool water over the burn for at least 3 to 5 minutes, or even longer if necessary.** Do not pack the burned area in ice. This can increase the extent of the injury.
- * **Never Apply Butter Or Any Kind Of Ointments To A Burn.** They can make the injury worse.
- * **Cover burns with a soft, clean, dry dressing, bandage or sheet.**
- * **Get emergency medical attention as soon as possible.**



Candle-Burning Safety

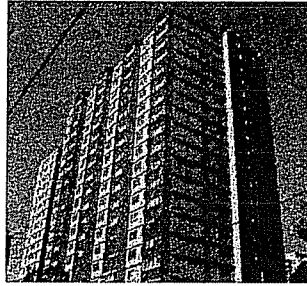


The number of home fires started by candles has doubled in the last 10 years. Although lit candles look pretty, they can be dangerous if used or placed improperly. The following are tips for using candles safely:

1. A candle flame can easily ignite any nearby combustibles. Keep all flammable materials, such as papers, magazines, towels, bedding, curtains, drapes and clothing away from lit candles.
2. Place candles in holders that are made of a material such as ceramic that can't burn, and that won't tip over. Be sure to place them where they can't be knocked over by pets or children.
3. Remember that during a power outage, flashlights are much safer light sources than candles.



Fire Safety in a High-Rise Building



Although generally you should try to get out of a building as quickly and safely as possible in a fire, getting out of a high-rise building can be much more difficult and might require a different strategy than getting out of a ground-level structure. The higher you are situated, the longer it takes to exit - if, in fact, conventional exits are possible at all. Elevators in high-rise buildings are frequently shut down in fire emergencies, which makes the evacuation of the elderly far more difficult. Smoke, fire and loss of electrical power can also make stairwells hazardous.

So what should you do if you find that all the escape routes of a high-rise building are blocked by smoke and/or fire? If this is the case, you should try to put distance and solid barriers between you and the fire, and then try to get help. The best way of sheltering yourself from fire will depend upon the fire's exact nature and location, but in general, you should go to another room, maybe on another floor, and preferably to a room that has a door, a window, a balcony and a telephone. The room should also be located where firefighters will be able to reach you.

Call for help if possible, but if the telephone is not operating, you may have to wave a towel or a bedsheet from a window or a balcony and call out to let others know your location. Then stay calm until help arrives.

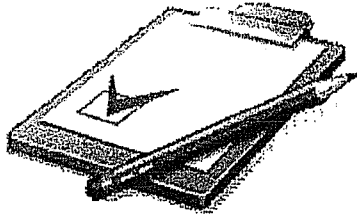
Using Oxygen Safely



People who use oxygen at home should always remember that using oxygen improperly can cause fires. The following are some **very** important tips to help protect you, your family, and your house when using oxygen:

- Call your fire department to make them aware that oxygen is being used in your house.
- Keep a working fire extinguisher within easy reach. Make sure you and your family know how to use it.
- Do **not** allow anyone to smoke in the room where oxygen is used. Your oxygen company can provide NO SMOKING signs to hang in your home.
- Keep the oxygen container at least 10 feet away from heat and open flames, such as a gas stove or fireplace.
- Avoid using electric razors or hair dryers while using oxygen.
- Keep the oxygen container upright. Turn off the oxygen system when it is not being used. Store cylinder away from heat sources and direct sunlight and secure with chain.
- If a fire starts, turn off the oxygen immediately, leave the house and call 911 from a neighbor's house.

Fire Safety Checklist



The following list includes many of the items a fire official would check if he were to conduct a safety check of your home. To make sure your home is safe, go through the list once a month. Contact your local fire department if you need assistance.

- * Test your smoke detector monthly by depressing the test button for several seconds to make sure it is working properly.
- * Check your extension cords and electrical outlets to make sure they are not defective.
- * If you have a fire extinguisher, check to see if the arrow is in the "green" (charged) zone.
- * Provide a trusted neighbor or the police department with the telephone number of someone to contact on your behalf in case of an emergency.
- * Make sure the number on your house is clearly visible and easy to see at night.
- * Dispose of any unwanted flammable materials promptly.
- * Keep one or more flashlights with fresh batteries available for use in an emergency.

Conclusion



The main point of this booklet is that **FIRE CAN BE PREVENTED**. This means preparing your home by making it safe from fire, and preparing yourself and other members of your family in case you actually have a fire. By being prepared, you will be able to act quickly in an emergency.

Remember that **FIRE CAN STRIKE ANYONE, AND FIRE CAN STRIKE ANYWHERE**. No one is ever completely safe from the possibility of an accidental house fire. But by being prepared, you **GREATLY** reduce the chances of becoming a victim of fire.

Although this booklet will provide you with a solid foundation of fire safety, **NO BOOK OR BOOKLET CAN POSSIBLY PREPARE YOU FOR ALL THE WAYS IN WHICH FIRE CAN STRIKE**. People in high-rise buildings, for example, have different fire prevention requirements than people living in single homes, even though many of the basic principles may be the same. By becoming more aware of the many ways that fires can start, you become better prepared to deal with unexpected fire situations.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT FIRE SAFETY, CALL YOUR LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT. They are there to help you, and can provide answers to any other questions you may have about fire safety.



The **NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY** is the central fire service agency in the State and is responsible for the development and enforcement of the State Uniform Fire Code, public fire safety education programs and firefighter training programs. It is housed within the State's Department of Community Affairs.

For more information on fire safety, visit the Division's web site at:
www.nj.gov/dca/dfs

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