



# House and Building Fires

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**A** fire can engulf a structure in a matter of minutes. Understanding the basic characteristics of fire and learning the proper safety practices can be the key to surviving a house or building fire. Some causes of fires include: heating devices, electrical wiring and cooking.



## Heating Devices

Heating devices such as portable heaters, wood stoves, and fireplaces demand safe operation. Use portable heaters in well-ventilated rooms only. Refuel kerosene heaters outdoors only. Have chimneys and wood stoves cleaned annually. Buy only approved heaters and follow the manufacturers' directions.

## Electrical wiring

- Replace wiring if frayed or cracked.
- Make sure wiring is not under rugs, over nails, or in high traffic areas. Do not overload outlets or extension cords.
- Outlets should have cover plates and no exposed wiring.
- Only purchase appliances and electrical devices that have a label indicating that they have been inspected by a testing laboratory such as Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM).

Do not store combustible materials in closed areas or near a heat source.

## Cooking

Keep the stove area clean and clear of combustibles such as bags, boxes, and other appliances. If a fire starts, put a lid over the burning pan or use a fire extinguisher. Be careful. Moving the pan can cause the fire to spread. Never pour water on grease fires.

Call the fire department from a location outside the building.

## Smoke Detectors

Install smoke detectors. Check them once a month and change the batteries at least every six months. They more than double the chance of surviving a fire. Smoke detectors sense abnormal amounts of smoke or invisible combustion gases in the air. They can detect both smoldering and burning fires. At least one smoke detector should be installed on every level of a structure. Test the smoke detectors each month and replace the batteries at least once a year. Purchase smoke detectors labeled by the Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM).



## Before A Fire

Develop and practice an escape plan. Make sure all individuals know what to do if a fire occurs.

- Draw a floor plan with at least two ways of escaping every room. Choose a safe meeting place outside the building.
- Practice alerting other occupants. It is a good idea to keep a bell and a flashlight in each area of the building for this purpose.
- Practice evacuating the building blindfolded. In a real fire situation, the amount of smoke generated by a fire may make it impossible to see.
- Practice staying low to the ground when escaping.
- Learn to feel all doors before opening them. If the door is hot, do not open it and get out another way.
- Learn to stop, drop to the ground, and roll if clothes catch fire.



Post emergency numbers near telephones. However, be aware that if a fire threatens your building, you should not place the call to your emergency services from inside the building. It is better to get out first and place the call from somewhere else.

Purchase collapsible ladders at hardware stores if you are in a multiple story building or home and practice using them.

Install A-B-C type fire extinguishers in designated areas of the building and teach occupants how to use them. The appropriate fire extinguisher should be used to control a small area that will allow you to exit.

## During a Fire

Get out as quickly and as safely as possible. Use the stairs to escape. When evacuating, stay low to the ground. If possible, cover mouth with a cloth to avoid inhaling smoke and gases. Close doors in each room after escaping to delay the spread of the fire.

If in a room with a closed door:

- if smoke is pouring in around the bottom of the door or it feels hot, keep the door closed.
- open a window to escape or for fresh air while awaiting rescue.
- if there is no smoke at the bottom or top and the door is not hot, then open the door slowly.
- if there is too much smoke or fire in the hall, slam the door shut.

## After a Fire

- give first aid where appropriate;
- immediately transport seriously injured or burned victims to professional medical care;
- stay out of damaged buildings;
- reenter the building only when local fire authorities say it is safe;
- look for structural damage;
- discard food that has been exposed to heat, smoke, or soot;
- contact insurance agent;
- don't discard damaged goods until after an inventory has been taken. Save receipts for money spent relating to fire loss.

This fact sheet was published with information from the U.S. Fire Administration and the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI-DWC) and is considered accurate at the time of publication.

The TDI-DWC also offers several free workplace safety publications online at [www.tdi.texas.gov/wc/safety/videoresources/index.html](http://www.tdi.texas.gov/wc/safety/videoresources/index.html), including:

- Fire Prevention for Small Businesses Fire Safety,
- Flammable Liquids Fire Safety Workplace Program.

The TDI-DWC features a free occupational safety and health audiovisual loan library. Call 512-804-4620 for more information or visit the agency website at [www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/videoresources/avcatalog.html](http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/videoresources/avcatalog.html).

Division of Workers' Compensation Resource Center, (800) 252-7031, [resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov), Safety Violations Hotline, (800) 452-9595, [safetyhotline@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:safetyhotline@tdi.texas.gov).