

## **Fire Safety for Seniors**

**People 65+ have a fire death rate nearly twice the national average, and those 75+ have one three times the National average.**

Seniors face the highest risk of perishing in a fire because their senses do not detect danger like they did in the past, and they lack the mobility to escape quickly in the case of an emergency. Whether living independently or in a care facility, seniors can take certain steps to remain safe from a fire. For these reasons, seniors need to take certain precautions.

### **Here is a list of steps to follow:**

- If you need to exit through smoke, crawl under it (since smoke rises).
- Cover your mouth and nose with a moist towel or an article of clothing to protect against fumes.
- Touch closed doors before choosing to exit them – if they are warm don't open them. Do not touch doorknobs, which can be extremely hot.
- Should your clothing catch on fire, drop to the floor and roll to extinguish flames.
- In case of a fire in a building, use stairs or the fire escape, never an elevator.
- Install smoke alarms on all levels of your home and outside sleeping areas. If you rent, landlords are required by law to provide working smoke alarms at the time a tenant moves in and tenants are required to maintain the alarm in working order. Studies show that homes with smoke alarms give residents twice the chance of survival.
- Test all alarms regularly and replace batteries at least every year. Smoke alarms need to be replaced every 10 years.
- Have in mind a primary escape route that can be taken in case of the need for a quick evacuation. Take a fire drill to make sure you can make it in under three minutes – the time it can take for a house to go up in flames.
- If you live in a multi-story house, the safest place to sleep is on the ground floor near an exit.

- Make sure windows are easy to open. Keep escape ladders near windows for upper floors.
- Ask your fire department for a home safety inspection and ways for you to improve your escape plan.
- The primary cause of fire deaths among seniors? Careless smoking. This means never smoke in bed or while lying on the couch. Use a large, sturdy ashtray; never leave it on the kitchen counter or in the sink overnight; and empty them into non-burnable containers, like a metal garbage can.
- When cooking, use a timer. Don't cook when taking medication that leaves you drowsy. Keep dish towels, aprons, and napkins, way from stove tops and don't wear loose fitting clothing when cooking.
- Never overload electrical outlets and extension cords.
- Have a fire extinguisher in your home; ideally you should have one on each level of your home.
- Replace any appliances that spark, smell unusual or overheat.
- Don't exceed the wattage recommended for light fixtures.
- Never put electrical wires under carpets.
- Keep lamps and night lights away from fabrics.
- Put plastic safety covers on electrical outlets.
- Keep matches away and out of reach whenever children visit.
- Keep portable space heaters away from anything flammable.
- Screen off fireplaces to contain sparks.
- Keep candles away from pets, children and curtains.
- Store flammable liquids safely away from heat sources and children.

## **Here are some important survival tips:**

- In case of fire, keep the door to the room you're in closed. A closed door acts as a barrier to smoke.
- Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents to keep out smoke.
- Place some kind of signal in the window that will call attention to your location. This could be as simple as a handwritten sign.
- If smoke or fire enters your house or apartment, call 911 to report it. Stay low to the floor to breathe in the best air. Place a wet cloth over your mouth and nose.

- Do not open or break windows. This will only allow smoke from the outside to enter and put you at greater risk.

## **Finding Refuge**

Should a fire emergency occur, those individuals unable to use exit stairs need to find an area of refuge on the floor they are on. They should then wait there for assistance from arriving firefighters.

An ideal area of refuge is an enclosed room near an exit stairwell that has a door, window and telephone. The door provides a barrier to smoke, the window offers a second emergency exit and the telephone provides a backup method of calling for help.

In a residential building, occupants unable to exit stairs should stay in their unit with the door shut and wait for help.