



Let's Retire Fire

A Factsheet for Older Americans

The facts speak for themselves: Americans over the age of 65 are one of the groups at greatest risk of dying in a fire. On average, more than 900 Americans age 65 and over die in fires. People over the age of 85 die in fires at a rate five times higher than the rest of the population. However, there are a number of precautionary steps older Americans can take to dramatically reduce their chances of becoming a fire casualty.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

WHY ARE OLDER PEOPLE AT RISK?

Older Americans are at risk for fire death and injuries for a number of reasons:

- They may be less able to take the quick action necessary in a fire emergency.
- They may be on medication that affects their ability to make quick decisions.
- Many older people live alone and when accidents happen others may not be around to help.

WHAT FIRE HAZARDS AFFECT OLDER PEOPLE?

- Cooking accidents are the leading cause of fire related injuries for older Americans. The kitchen is one of the most active and potentially dangerous rooms in the home.
- The unsafe use of smoking materials is the leading cause of fire deaths among older Americans.
- Heating equipment is responsible for a big share of fires in seniors' homes. Extra caution should be used with alternate heaters such as wood stoves or electric space heaters.
- Faulty wiring is another major cause of fires affecting the elderly. Older homes can have serious



wiring problems, ranging from old appliances with bad wiring to overloaded sockets.

SAFETY TIPS FOR OLDER AMERICANS

- **Kitchen Fires.** Most kitchen fires occur because food is left unattended on the stove or in the oven. If you must leave the kitchen while cooking, take a spoon or potholder with you to remind you to return to the kitchen. Never cook with loose, dangling sleeves that can ignite easily. Heat cooking oils gradually and use extra caution when deep-frying. If a fire breaks out in a pan, put a lid on the pan. Never throw water on a grease fire. Never use a range or stove to heat your home.
- **Space Heaters.** Buy only heaters evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters

Laboratories (UL). Use only the manufacturer's recommended fuel for each heater. Do not use electric space heaters in the bathroom or around other wet areas. Do not dry or store objects on top of your heater. Keep combustibles away from heat sources.

- **Smoking.** Don't leave smoking materials unattended. Use "safety ashtrays" with wide lips. Empty all ashtrays into the toilet or a metal container every night before going to bed. Never smoke in bed.

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.



For more information contact:

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Homeland Security