



TIPS

TipSheet: Preventing Fires in the Home

There is much families can do to prevent a fire from starting or spreading in the home, and to help prepare family members to make a safe escape in the event of a fire.

Smoke alarms

- Install smoke alarms in your home on every level, ideally near all sleeping areas.
- Purchase smoke alarms which also test carbon monoxide levels.
- Change smoke alarm batteries on a specific day every year, for example, on daylight savings day so that you do not forget. Also test the batteries regularly, which is done by pressing a test button on the alarm.

Cigarettes, lighters and matches

- Rid your home of any non child resistant cigarette lighters.
- When purchasing lighters, ensure they meet the new EU child resistant standards —nearly 35% of lighters on the market tested were still deemed unsafe.
- Do not smoke in bed or when reclining late at night on a sofa.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach, and educate children that the products are dangerous.
- Never leave a burning cigarette or candles unattended.
- Ideally, do not smoke in the house at all. Houses with smokers in them have a higher incidence of fatal fires (see Fact-sheet: Fires in the Home for more information).

Electronic products

- Switch heavily loaded or multi pronged electronic adapters off or unplug them when not in use. This aids in preventing spread of a fire, plus reduces energy costs.
- Do not overload electric sockets.
- Keep electric portable heaters away from furniture and curtains. Position them where they cannot be knocked over.
- Do not place portable halogen lamps in children's bedrooms or near flammable materials such as curtains.
- Do not use electronic items such as lamps

or nightlights which do not meet EU safety standards.

Fireplaces and woodstoves

- Use a fireplace screen for an open fireplace, and surround a woodstove with an "ember-safe" zone, removing items which could catch fire through a stray ember.

Choosing sleepwear

Most fires occur in the evening or morning, when a child is likely to be in sleep or lounge wear. Often children themselves accidentally begin the fire, and loose clothing may cause a small fire to spread more quickly.

- Choose children's sleepwear which fits closely to the body and does not have dangling elements or loose sleeves.
- Mixed polyester blends are more flame resistant than untreated cotton. Cotton not treated with a flame retardant will not self-extinguish.
- A denser weave of cloth aids in fire resistance.

Flame resistant products

There is currently much concern over the health risks which some flame retardant chemicals may pose. Many chemicals have been banned over the years, and the European Commission is active in identifying safe and unsafe flame retardants through the REACH programme.

Flame retardants are not only found in clothing and furniture, they are also in large and small electronic devices, building materials, textiles, plastics, and car seats. Without their use, fires spread more quickly.

If you wish to reduce your family's exposure to potentially dangerous flame retardants:

- Look online for lists of electronics, furniture, and clothing companies which use the safest flame retardant chemicals and methods.
- Replace older household items which may contain now banned chemicals.



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- Do not reupholster old foam furniture.
- Ask salespersons which flame retardants are used when purchasing items, especially televisions, rugs, mattresses and sofas.
- Do not let your child mouth items such as mobile phones or remote controls.
- Vacuum frequently, using a HEPA filter if possible.
- Avoid excessive carpeting in the household, and do not let an infant regularly play on a rug or carpet which may contain now banned flame retardant chemicals.

Related European Child Safety Alliance resources:

[Factsheet: Fires in the Home](#)

[Factsheet: Contact Burns and Scalds](#)

[Tipsheet: Preventing Contact Burns and Scalds](#)

Educate your children

Educate your children on how to prevent fires and also what to do should a fire occur.

- Discuss a plan for escaping your home in the event of a fire.
- Teach your children how to “drop and roll” to put out a fire on clothing.
- Teach your children that it is safest to crawl or run below levels of smoke so they can breathe and see more easily.
- Teach your children that in the event of a fire, test a door for heat before opening it. If the door is already hot, it should not be opened.
- Teach your children the local emergency services telephone number.
- Local organisations often offer fire safety programmes to schools, encourage your school to plan one.

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