

TERRIFYING HOUSE FIRES

House fires are terrifying, especially for young children. You have heard the TV & radio advertisements urging you to create a fire plan and like most people "you plan to get around to doing it" but unfortunately you keep putting it off!

Almost 50 people in Ireland die each year as a result of house fires and during last weekend of 2010 two lives were lost in separate house fires in Galway and Cork. It is widely reported in the media that Ireland appears to have the highest level of fire deaths per capita in Europe, perhaps **NOW** is the time to create a fire safety plan for your home!

So talk to your family about fire safety. Ask your children what they know and fill in the blanks as you discuss escape routes and ways to extinguish a fire.

In order to create your plan, create a list of the following

1. The number of smoke alarms you have & their location
2. The doors & windows available to use as fire exits in your house or apartment
Specify if any of these need keys & where they are located
3. Emergency telephone numbers
4. An obvious place outside your home that can be used as a meeting-point

So for example your list could read as follows:

❖ **The number of smoke alarms you have & their location**

- 2 smoke alarms (1 in the downstairs hallway & one on the upstairs landing)
- Date last checked 12/09/10 (These should be checked regularly)

❖ **The doors & windows available to use as fire exits in your house or apartment**

- Downstairs:
 - Hall Door - No key needed
 - Kitchen Door - Key in the lock
 - Living-room window - Key on window sill
 - Dining-room window - No key needed
 - Kitchen window - No key needed
- Upstairs:
 - Bedroom window leading on to kitchen roof - No key needed

❖ **Emergency telephone numbers**

- In emergency dial: 999, 112

❖ **Meeting-Point**

- The gate to Mr. O'Reillys Garden,

Fire Escape Plan: What to do in the event of a fire

Keep escape routes clear at all times

Avoid leaving kids bikes or schoolbags in front of doors or on the stairs

Close All Doors

Close All Doors when going to bed at night. It can give you valuable time to save the lives of the people you love.

Stay Calm

Whether the fire has been discovered by you or your smoke alarm, stay calm and put your fire escape plan into action.

Raise the alarm.

Shout to wake everyone up, and make your way out by the quickest route.

Do not investigate the fire

Opening doors can increase the fire speed. So just get yourself & your loved ones out of the property

Escape Routes

Check doors with the back of your hand; if they are warm it means the fire is on the other side, so do not open them. Only open doors you need to open in order to escape.

Smoke

If there is smoke, crawl along near to the floor where the air will be cleaner.

Meeting-Point

Go to the meeting-point outside your home & ensure that everyone is present

Call The Emergency Services

Once everyone is out of the house call the Fire Service at 999 or 112 from a call box, mobile phone or neighbour's house.

Protect

Do not go back in your home or allow anyone else to return until the Fire Service tells you it is safe.

Protection is the best cure

Check for fire dangers in your home and correct them

Check your home room by room for fire dangers and correct them.

Remember: most domestic fires start in the living room, bedroom and kitchen at night while we are sleeping.

Kitchen

Put a fire blanket and working fire extinguisher within easy reach in the kitchen and learn how to use them.

When cooking, always use back rings first and turn in utensil handles ensuring the handles are not over other rings.

- Keep cookers clean - grease is a fire risk.
- Turn off cooker when not in use.
- Never use a cooker for drying clothes.
- Check cooker is switched off properly before going to bed.
- Clean or replace filters in extractor fans on a regular basis.
- Avoid using chip pans as they are a major fire risk.

Chip Pan

If using a Chip Pan, use them with extreme care. It is highly recommended that you only use appliances that are sold and fitted with thermostat controls for frying chips.

- Never fill the chip pan more than one third full of oil or fat.
- Test the oil or fat temperature by placing a small piece of bread in the pan. If it crisps quickly, the oil or fat is ready. If the oil or fat is smoking then it is too hot. Turn the heat off and let the oil or fat cool down before starting again.
- Never leave a chip pan unattended.
- Never move a hot chip pan.

Electrical items

Electrical items should be used carefully and stored properly when not in use.

- Never overload sockets as it is a major fire risk.
- Never run electric cables across cookers.
- Switch off and plug out electrical appliances when not in use.
- If electrical cables or plugs are damaged, worn or frayed, contact a qualified electrician.

Living Area

Open Fires

- Always place a proper fitting spark guard and fire guard in front of an open fire.
- Never place anything on the fire guard.
- Don't store items like papers, magazines, clothing or combustible items near a fire.
- Never use an open fire to air clothes as this is a major fire risk.

Chimney Cleaning

Get your chimney cleaned regularly - follow this recommended cleaning guide:

- Wood burning fires: Clean 4 times a year, when in use
- Solid fuel fires: Clean once a year if using smokeless fuel
- Solid fuel fires: Clean twice a year if using coal
- Oil Fires: Clean once a year
- Gas Fires: Clean once a year if designed for sweeping

Portable Heaters

- Use portable heaters with extreme care.
- Position portable heaters away from furniture, curtains and flammable items.
- Never move heaters when in use.
- Ensure portable heaters are switched off and/or plugged out before you leave the house or before going to bed.

Candles

- Never leave lit candles unattended and ensure candles are in their proper holders.
- Position candles away from draughts.
- Ensure candles are NOT near items that may catch fire such as curtains, clothing or bedding etc.
- Avoid moving a lit candle.
- Ensure all candles are properly extinguished before you leave the house or going to bed.

Smoking

Never ever smoke when you are feeling tired, especially when you are in bed or relaxing in a chair.

Remember: medication and alcohol can make you drowsy and smoking is a real fire risk when you are tired and drowsy.

- Always use an ashtray when smoking.
- Empty all ashtrays before going to bed. Ensure the ashtray contents are fully extinguished by running them under a tap before emptying.

Bedroom

- Never ever smoke in the bedroom.
- Have a torch or flash lamp near your bed for emergency lighting.
- Bring your portable or mobile phone to your bedroom for emergency use.
- Take extreme care when using electrical items, such as mobile phone chargers and hair straighteners. Unplug and allow them to cool down completely before storage.

Electric Blanket

- Use electric blankets properly and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Check your electric blanket regularly for wear and damage.
- When storing electric blankets, roll them instead of folding them.
- Get your electric blanket checked regularly.

How to recognise a dangerous electric blanket
Have your blanket checked or replaced if:

- The fabric or flex is worn or frayed;
- There are scorch marks anywhere;
- The tie-tapes (where originally fitted) are damaged or missing;
- Any connections are loose;
- The plug or mains lead is damaged, make sure this is repaired before you use it.

Remember, older blankets are much more likely to have one or more of these faults.

- Have your blanket checked or replaced if you are in any doubt!
- Always turn off and unplug your electric blanket before going to sleep.

'Last thing at night' Routine'

- Ensure fires are well down and spark guards are in place in front of open fires.
- Do not leave your television, radio or music system on standby.
- Only appliances designed for 24 hour use should be left plugged in at night-time e.g. fridges, freezers etc.
- Plug out the mobile phone charger when your mobile phone is charged and when you are going out or going to bed.
- Check every room and close all doors when going to bed.
- Switch off and plug out your electric blanket before going to sleep.
- Empty ashtrays properly and extinguish candles, before going to bed.
- If your exits require keys for opening, ensure the keys are in the locks before going to bed.
- Ensure all escape routes are clear before going to bed.