Fire Safety for Older Adults

Older Adults at Greatest Risk for Fire Death
Older adults, those age 65 and above, accounted for 14% of the population, but 44% of the fire deaths in 2018. They were 3.1 times as likely to die in a fire as adults under the age of 65.

Smoking Fires are the Leading Cause of Fire Deaths for Older Adults
Thirteen percent (13%) of all fire injuries and 47% of all fire deaths to seniors were from smoking fires. Here are some smoking fire safety tips:

• If you smoke, smoke outdoors.
• Use large, sturdy ashtrays or a can filled with sand to put out smoking materials.
• Be sure that matches and smoking materials are fully extinguished. Wet them under a faucet before disposing of them.
• Never extinguish cigarettes in potted plants or mulch.
• If you are drowsy or falling asleep put out your cigarette. Never smoke in bed.

Never smoke while using oxygen, or near an oxygen source. If you can’t stop smoking, remove your oxygen, wait ten minutes, and go outside to smoke.

Electrical Fires the Second Leading Cause of Fire Deaths to Older Adults
Electrical fires caused 26% of the fire deaths and 10% of the fire injuries to older adults that took place in homes. Here are some electrical fire safety tips.

• It is important not to overload outlets and power strips.
• Use one appliance per outlet especially if it is a heat generating appliance.
• Don’t run electrical cords under rugs or let them get pinched by furniture.
• Extension cords should only be used temporarily; they are not designed for long-term or permanent use.
• Remember that space heaters need at least 3-feet of space from anything that can burn.

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No Working Smoke Alarms in 36% of Senior Fire Deaths

Of the 19 senior fire deaths in homes in 2018, 21% were in homes that either had no smoke alarms or had alarms that did not operate.

- Install smoke alarms on every level and outside each sleeping area. If you cannot install one yourself, call a friend or your local fire department.
- Replace the batteries twice a year and test each one once a month. Smoke alarms themselves need to be replaced every ten years.
- Alarms cannot guarantee escape; they can only provide early warning. It is important to make and practice a home escape plan.
- Keep these three essential items by your bedside: your eyeglasses, a telephone, and a whistle. Eyeglasses will help you see and avoid injury as you escape a fire. The whistle will alert other household members to the fire and rescuers to your location. The telephone will allow you to phone for help if you cannot escape through a door.