If heating with wood, have the chimney cleaned annually and inspected for cracked mortar.

Smoke and CO Alarms

Make sure there are working smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms on every level of the home and outside sleeping areas. Replace them every 10 years.

Change alkaline batteries in alarms twice a year when we change our clocks. Consider installing alarms with 10 year batteries.

For people with a hearing loss, consider investing in strobe alarms for the living areas and a bed shaker alarm that "hears" the smoke alarm signal.

Resources:

Local Senior Center or
Council on Aging

Local Fire Department

Alzheimer's Association of MA
http://www.alz.org/manh/

The Department of Fire Services does not expressly endorse any specific product. Reference is for informational and demonstration purposes only.

StoveTopFireStopper
http://www.stovetopfirestop.com/

Safe-T-Element
http://www.pioneeringtech.com/safe-t-element

Escape Planning

Talk with the senior about how to get out of the house in three minutes in case of a fire.

Keep eyeglasses, canes, walkers, hearing instruments next to the bed or wherever they sleep at night.

Make sure that pathways are clear of clutter. Objects can become major obstacles in an emergency.

Install night lights throughout the house to prevent falls for those "midnight trips".

Planning for Emergencies

Make sure the house number is clearly visible from the street so first responders can find the house quickly.

Contact the Senior Center or Fire Department about a File of Life that records the senior's medications and is kept on or in the refrigerator. EMTs will know to look there and grab it if they need to take the senior to the hospital.

E-911 Disability Form: You can inform the local public safety center if someone uses a life support system such as home oxygen or has some other disability, in case of extended power outage or natural disaster.

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Keeping Our Aging Parents Safe



DEPARTMENT OF FIRE SERVICES
Peter J. Ostroskey • State Fire Marshal

The Massachusetts State Fire Marshal offers these tips for keeping our aging parents safe from fires and burns in their own homes.

Fire & Burns As We Age

Physical and mental changes occur in the aging process that may limit the ability of older adults to react quickly in an emergency. Changes in vision, hearing, sense of touch, memory, cognitive ability and mobility may impact their safety. Here is some information about how adult children helping to care for aging parents can keep them safe from fires and burns.

Burns and Aging

As we age, our skin gets thinner so the same burn will be much deeper than on a younger person. Also, a decreased sense of touch from diabetic neuropathy can lead to worse burns.

Encourage older adults to use oven mitts to protect against hot liquid spills and touching the hot parts of the oven or pots.

Check the temperature on the hot water heater. Set at 125 degrees F. MA law requires it to be between 110 and 130. However burns occur in seconds at higher temperatures.

Heating pads and electric blankets are a frequent cause of burns for seniors. Consider a heating pad where you have to hold the control to keep it on.

Burn First Aid

While most seniors understandably are more afraid of breaking a hip than of experiencing a fire or burn, encourage older adults to *Stop, Drop and Roll* to extinguish a clothing fire. Or to use a towel, blanket, robe, or coat to smother the flames.

Cool a burn. For minor burns, run cool water over the burn immediately.

Seek emergency medical help immediately for more serious burns.

Use sunscreen to avoid sunburn.

Cooking Safety

Remind the cooks to always stay in the kitchen when cooking. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of fires in the home and the leading cause of fire injuries to people over 65. Encourage the use of timers.

Consider installing in-hood fire extinguishers that can quickly contain a stove-top fire.

Consider installing high-heat limiting burner covers. They limit the temperature so food will cook - water boils at 212F - but a piece of paper - that burns at 500F - will only turn brown but not ignite.

Encourage microwave oven use if you can be sure the senior won't put metal inside or if you have a new type where it does not matter if you do.

Electrical Safety

Just like people, electrical systems need regular check-ups to keep them in good working order.

If you see a lot of extension cords, frequently blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers, flickering lights, or smell a vague odor of something burning, it's time to call an electrician to evaluate the system.

Extension cords are a fire and a trip hazard and a sign to update the wiring.

Check for overloaded electrical outlets and power strips.

Check for frayed wires.

Keep Warm, Keep Safe

Have the heating systems cleaned and inspected by a professional before the start of each heating season. Efficiently running furnaces save money. Heating assistance programs can help low-income homeowners with maintenance.

Space heaters need space. Make sure the space heater is 3-feet from anything that can catch fire.

Discourage the use of extension cords with space heaters, but if needed to put the heater in a safe place, make sure it is properly rated for the appliance.