



Fire Safety for Children

*****Embargoed for Monday, February 14, 10:00 am eastern*****

Every winter, Americans see an increase in residential fires, as families heat their homes and struggle to stay warm during the winter months. These fires pose serious threats to the health and safety of all members of a family – but put children age 4 and younger at an elevated risk of death or injury in a fire when compared to older children. And in many cases, these deaths and injuries are largely preventable.

In fact, each year, more than 3,500 Americans die in fires and approximately 18,300 are injured, according to National Fire Protection Association data. A new study by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) finds that children ages 14 and under accounted for 13 percent of fire deaths in 2007 – and 52 percent of all children who die in fires are under the age of five. With the United States in the middle of an especially cold winter, FEMA, the U.S. Fire Administration, and the National Commission on Children and Disasters, are teaming up to call families and communities to action to keep our nation's children safe.

As part of this call to action, we are encouraging families to take simple steps now to prevent fires and to protect children. We are also encouraging our many partners, across the fire and emergency medical services, public health, emergency management and many other fields to help us get the message out. To spread the word, we are launching the following online tools and resources:

- An updated website with key tips and resources for how to protect children – and the entire family – from residential fires;
- A widget that will link to this website and resources; and
- A new Twitter hashtag to promote a dialogue about children's fire safety and share tips.

These updated tools will offer tips for how to prevent the two leading causes of fires during the winter months: heating and cooking.

Heating

The high cost of home heating fuels and utilities has caused many Americans to search for alternate sources of home heating. The use of wood burning stoves is growing and space heaters are selling rapidly. These heating sources are a major contributing factor in residential fires and may put children at risk. Many of these fires can be prevented.

What you can do:

- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Never allow children to play near a fireplace, wood burning stove, space heater, or other heating sources. Establish a 3 foot safety zone around all heat sources.

- Have your chimney or wood stove inspected and cleaned annually by a certified chimney specialist, and use a metal mesh screen when burning a fire in your fireplace.
- Follow manufacturer instructions when alternative heat sources such as wood stoves and kerosene heaters are used. Kerosene heaters may be prohibited by local fire marshals.
- Use fire-resistant materials on walls around wood stoves. Store fuels in proper containers, and keep them out of the reach of children and away from combustible materials.

Cooking

Many families gather in the kitchen to spend time together, but it can be one of the most hazardous rooms in the house if you don't practice safe cooking behaviors. Cooking is the leading cause of reported residential fires and fire injuries in the United States.

What you can do:

- Young children are at high risk of being burned by hot food and liquids. Keep children away from cooking areas by enforcing a "child-free zone" of 3 feet (1 meter) around the stove and microwave.
- When young children are present, use the stove's back burners whenever possible.
- Never hold a child while cooking, drinking, or carrying hot foods or liquids.
- Keep young children at least 3 feet (1 meter) away from any place where hot food or drink is being prepared or carried, such as around the microwave. Keep hot foods and liquids away from table and counter edges.
- Teach children that hot things can burn them.
- When children are old enough, teach them to cook safely. Supervise them closely.

Be Prepared

In at least 23 percent of all fatal residential fires, no smoke alarms were present. Keep your family safe, by installing a smoke and carbon monoxide alarm on every level of your home and inside and outside sleeping areas. Test smoke alarm batteries every month and change them at least once a year. In addition, make an escape plan with a common meeting place and call 911 once you are safely outside. Practice the escape plan with your family; plan a home fire drill on a regular basis. Families can further reduce their risk of injury or death by also installing residential sprinkler systems.

Practice safe fire behaviors and know what to do in an emergency to give your family extra seconds to escape. For more information on fire-safe behaviors and activities, visit www.ready.gov and www.usfa.dhs.gov.