

# Fire Safety Tips



## Houston Fire Department Fire Safety Tips

Statistics indicate that more than thirty percent of the house and apartment fires that the Houston Fire Department responds to, involve homes with smoke detectors that are not working properly due to dead or missing batteries, and homes that have no smoke detectors present, at all.

Smoke can often times be more deadly than the fire, itself, especially if members of the household are sleeping. Unknowingly inhaling the smoke, may cause the victim to experience a deeper sleep. Without the sound of an alarm from a working smoke detector to wake the individual, he/she may succumb to the smoke as they breathe it in.

Fire doubles in size every 30 seconds. Although most fires are preventable, they do happen, and a working smoke detector gives you and your family the extra minutes needed to safely get out of your home.

The Houston Fire Department urges citizens to replace your smoke detector's batteries twice a year. "When you change your clock, change your battery". It is also very important to have and practice an evacuation plan so that once you are alerted by the smoke detector; you know how to get out and stay out. It is also important to have a designated meeting place once you and your family escape.

The Houston Fire Department asks that citizens be careful and follow some simple day to day safety tips :



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**Space Heaters / Other Supplemental Heating Sources Tips-** Any shift away from the exclusive use of central heating presents an increased possibility for fire.

- Never leave children unattended in a room with a space heater - Children knock over space heaters especially if they are placed on top of wobbly tables or stools and near where the children play. Children may also stick paper or toys in the grates of the space heaters especially gas space heaters. The city had two reported fires in 2004 caused by children playing with space heaters.
- Keep all combustible materials, including yourself at least 3 feet from the heater.
- Open face heaters should have a screen.
- Provide ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

**Vented Gas / Fired Heating Appliances Tips -** Central heating units, floor furnaces, recessed wall heaters, and vented space heaters.

- Have a working Carbon Monoxide detector!
- Inspect annually by a qualified service technician. Do Not wait for cold weather!
- Do not use these type units without a proper vent pipe. Vent pipes must exhaust to the outside!
- If your flame is not blue, it is not burning properly. It is producing Carbon Monoxide, which can't be seen, smelled or tasted. Turn it off.
- Use flexible metal tubing with threaded ends to connect the heater to the gas valve. There should be a cutoff valve for the heater at the wall. Never use a rubber hose to connect a space heater to the gas valve!
- Use soapy water to check all connections and valves for leaks. NEVER use a match to test for a gas leak!
- Look for the American Gas Association label and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for proper usage.

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## Houston Fire Department Fire Safety Tips (Continued)

### Electric Heaters Tips

- Never overload outlets or breakers
- Don't use extension cords for the heater. If the cord is hot to the touch, turn off the heater and unplug it!
- Electric heaters permanently installed in the wall or ceiling should have lint and dust removed regularly. Lint and dust will burn!

To Help Prevent Electrical Fires, HFD recommends the following:

- Check appliance cords for frays, broken plugs or damaged wires.
- Don't overload electrical outlets.
- If you have an older home, make sure the wiring system can handle today's increased electrical loads. Consult an electrician if needed.
- If smoke comes from an outlet, shut off the power at the circuit breaker or fuse box and call the fire department.
- If an appliance catches fire, unplug it immediately if possible.
- Never throw water on an electrical fire- you could be electrocuted.
- Electrical fire must be extinguished with a non-conductive agent such as dry chemicals, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), halogen or household baking soda.
- Extinguishers for electrical fires will be labeled or coded "C".

**Cooking** is the number one cause of residential fires and is preventable by following these safety tips:

- Always, have a working smoke detector!
- Over half the people attempting to extinguish a kitchen fire are injured. Often the best advice is to get everyone out of the house and call the fire department (911) from a neighbor's house.
- Use a moderate cooking temperature
- Don't overfill the container
- If you must leave the kitchen, turn the burner off (Unattended cooking is the primary cause of kitchen fires. Over half of these are grease/oil fires.)
- Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove. Curious children may reach up and grab the handle, pulling the hot contents down on themselves.
- Don't position handles over another burner, it may catch on fire or burn someone who touches it.
- Wear short sleeves or tight fitting long sleeves when cooking to reduce a clothing fire hazard.
- Shield yourself from scalding steam when lifting lids from hot pans.
- Make sure pot holders are not too close to the stove. They could catch fire!
- Keep ovens, broilers, stove tops, and exhaust ducts free from grease.
- If there is a fire in the oven - Turn off the oven and keep the oven door closed.
- Never try to move the pan, don't throw water on it, and don't put flour on it.
- If you attempt to extinguish the fire, it is best to use a class ABC multipurpose fire extinguisher. Follow the manufacturer's instructions - stay back 6 to 8 feet and be careful not to spray the grease out of the pan. Baking soda can also smother the fire. Fires can double in size every 30 seconds.



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## Houston Fire Department Fire Safety Tips (Continued)

**Improper use of Barbeque Pits** or improper disposal of barbeque coals, ashes or briquettes and carelessly discarded smoking materials can easily ignite outdoor fires.

- Portable barbecue pits, charcoal grills and other open-flame cooking devices outside of a building should not be operated on combustible balconies or located within 10 feet of combustible walls or roofs or other combustible materials.
- When igniting the barbecue charcoal, citizens should use a charcoal lighter, not gasoline. Gasoline can flash violently in and around the pit causing serious injuries to anyone in the area of the flash. A fire extinguisher or charged garden hose should be handy while the fire is burning. Check the pit frequently to insure that it is okay.
- Hot ash and coals from barbecue pits and charcoal burners should be placed in a non-combustible container until cooled or thoroughly saturated with water, before being disposed of.

**Candle Use**-Most people do not see candles as a major fire hazard, but according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) candle fires account for 5 percent of all home fires with 50 percent of candle fires occurring when combustible materials are left near.

- Always have a working smoke detector
- Use candles only with constant adult supervision
- Never leave a candle burning!
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire, such as clothing, paper or curtains
- Place candles and candleholders on a secure piece of furniture. Make sure candleholders are non-combustible and large enough to collect the dripping wax.
- Do not place candles in windows where blinds or curtains can close over them.
- Keep wicks trimmed to 1/4 inch and extinguish candles when they burn to within 2 inches of the holder
- Keep candles and all open flames away from flammable liquids
- Do not use candles in places where they can be knocked over by children or pets

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# Carbon Monoxide



## Houston Fire Department Carbon Monoxide Safety

THE HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT WANTS YOU TO BE AWARE OF *THE DANGERS OF CARBON MONOXIDE*.

- Carbon Monoxide is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that can kill you before you are even aware it is in your house.
- CO causes side effects such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, disorientation and fatigue that are often mistaken for the flu. These effects can vary greatly from person to person depending on age, overall health and length of exposure.
- According to statistics, CO kills hundreds and injures thousands of people each year.
- CO is produced during the incomplete combustion of fuels such as kerosene, natural gas, oil, gasoline, coal & even wood.
- The gas may originate from your furnace, fireplace, stove, hot water heater, barbeque grill or automobile.
- The danger increases more during the winter months as heaters are used more frequently and fresh air ventilation is minimized by closed windows.
- Warming up automobiles in an attached garage, even with the garage door open, can allow concentrated amounts of CO to enter your house through nearby windows or carport door.
- When inhaled, carbon monoxide is absorbed into the bloodstream 200 times as fast as oxygen.
- Purchase a Carbon Monoxide detector if you use gas or a fireplace for your heating. Have your furnace professionally inspected every year and check for CO emissions.
- Install a Carbon Monoxide detector in the hallway near every separate sleeping area of the home.
- When your CO alarm sounds, ventilate the house with fresh air by opening windows and doors.
- Check your CO detector by every month pressing the test button and replace the detector every 5 years.

*A message from the Houston Fire Department [www.houstonfire.org](http://www.houstonfire.org)*



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