

# Candle Safety

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Remember that a candle is an open flame. It can easily ignite any combustible nearby.

## Facts and figures

- During 2001, an estimated 18,000 home fires started by candles were reported to public fire departments. These fires resulted in an estimated 190 civilian deaths, 1,450 civilian injuries and an estimated direct property loss of \$265 million.
- Home candle fires rose 15% from 2000 to 2001 to hit their 22-year peak in 2001, the latest year for which data is available.
- Candle fires accounted for an estimated 5% of all reported home fires.
- Two-fifths (41%) of the home candle fires started in the bedroom.
- Over the last decade, candle fires have more than tripled from the 5,500 reported in 1990.
- December had almost twice the number of home candle fires of an average month.
- One-third (34%) of candle fires occurred after candles were left unattended, abandoned or inadequately controlled; Twenty-six percent occurred when some form of combustible material was left or came too close to the candle; Six percent were started by people (usually children) playing with the candle.
- Eleven percent of home candle fires started after the candle user fell asleep.
- Christmas Day was the peak day of the year for home candle fires in 1999-2001. Second peak day was New Year's Day. Third peak day was Christmas Eve.

Source: National estimates based on NFIRS and NFPA survey.

## Safety tips:

- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire (e.g. clothing, books, paper, curtains, [Christmas trees](#), flammable decorations).
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over easily, are made from a material that can't burn and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Don't place lit candles in windows, where blinds and curtains can close over them.
- Place candle holders on a sturdy, uncluttered surface and do not use candles in places where they could be knocked over by children or pets.
- Keep candles and all open flames away from flammable liquids.
- Keep candle wicks trimmed to one-quarter inch and extinguish taper and pillar candles when they get to within two inches of the holder or decorative material. Votives and containers should be extinguished before the last half-inch of wax starts to melt.
- Avoid candles with combustible items embedded in them.

## Candles & children:

- Keep candles up high out of reach of children.
- Never leave a child unattended in a room with a candle. A child should not sleep in a room with a lit candle.
- Don't allow children or teens to have candles in their bedrooms.
- Store candles, matches and lighters up high and out children's sight and reach, preferably in a locked cabinet.

## During power outages:

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- Try to avoid carrying a lit candle. Don't use a lit candle when searching for items in a confined space.
- Never use a candle for a light when checking pilot lights or fueling equipment such as a kerosene heater or lantern. The flame may ignite the fumes

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## **Cooking Safety**

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Cooking fires are the #1 cause of home fires and home fire injuries. Most cooking equipment fires start with the ignition of common household items (e.g., food or grease, cabinets, wall coverings, paper or plastic bags, curtains, etc.).

### **Facts & figures\***

- In 2001, there were 17,100 reported home structure fires associated with cooking equipment, resulting in 370 deaths, 4,290 injuries and \$453 million in direct property damage.
- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home cooking fires.
- Three in every 10 reported home fires start in the kitchen – more than any other place in the home.
- Two out of three reported home cooking fires start with the range or stove.
- Electric ranges or stoves have a higher risk of fires, injuries and property damage, relative to usage, than gas ranges or stoves, but gas ranges or stoves have a higher risk of fire deaths.

\*From NFPA's *Home Cooking Fire Patterns and Trends*, January 2005

### **Safety tips:**

- Always use cooking equipment tested and approved by a recognized testing facility.
- Never leave cooking food on the stovetop unattended, and keep a close eye on food cooking inside the oven.
- Keep cooking areas clean and clear of combustibles (e.g. potholders, towels, rags, drapes and food packaging).
- Keep children away from cooking areas by enforcing a “kid-free zone” of three feet (1 meter) around the stove. Keep pets from underfoot so you do not trip while cooking. Also, keep pets off cooking surfaces and nearby countertops to prevent them from knocking things onto burner. Wear short, close fitting or tightly rolled sleeves when cooking. Loose clothing can dangle onto stove burners and catch fire.
- Never use a wet oven mitt, as it presents a scald danger if the moisture in the mitt is heated.
- Always keep a potholder, oven mitt and lid handy. If a small fire starts in a pan on the stove, put on an oven mitt and smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan. Turn off the burner. Don't remove the lid until it is completely cool. Never pour water on a grease fire and never discharge a fire extinguisher onto a pan fire, as it can spray or shoot burning grease around the kitchen, actually spreading the fire.
- If there is an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you and your clothing.
- If there is a microwave fire, keep the door closed and unplug the microwave. Call the fire department and make sure to have the oven serviced before you use it again. Food cooked in a microwave can be dangerously hot. Remove the lids or other coverings from microwaved food carefully to prevent steam burns.

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## **Smoking Material-Safety**

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Smoking materials (i.e., cigarettes, cigars, pipes, etc.) are the leading cause of fire deaths in the United States. Roughly one of every four fire deaths in 2001 was attributed to smoking materials.

### **Facts & figures**

- In 2001, there were an estimated 31,200 smoking-material fires in structures, 830 civilian deaths, 1,770
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civilian injuries and \$386 million in property damage. Of the fire deaths, 770 occurred in the home.

- In Canada there were 3,800 fires in 1999 associated with smoking materials. These fires caused 120 civilian deaths, 260 civilian injuries and direct property damage of \$58 million Canadian (\$39 million U.S.).
- The most common material first ignited in home smoking material-related fires was trash, followed by mattresses and bedding and upholstered furniture.

Source: NFPA's *The Smoking-Material Fire Problem*, November 2004, by John R. Hall, Jr.

### Safety tips

- Encourage smokers to smoke outside.
- Keep smoking materials away from anything that can burn (i.e., mattresses, bedding, upholstered furniture, draperies, etc.).
- Never smoke in bed or when you are drowsy, intoxicated or medicated.
- Use large, deep, non-tip ashtrays to prevent ashes from spilling onto furniture and check them frequently. Do not rest ashtrays on sofas or chairs.
- Completely douse butts and ashes with water before throwing them away as they can smolder in the trash and cause a fire.
- Smoking should not be allowed in a home where oxygen is in use.
- Whenever someone has been smoking in the home, always check on, between and under upholstery and cushions and inside trashcans for butts that may be smoldering.
- When smokers visit your home, ask them to keep smoking materials, lighters and matches with them so young children do not touch them.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, out of children's sight and reach (preferably in a locked cabinet).
- If you smoke, choose fire-safe cigarettes. They are less likely to cause fires.

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## Home Escape Planning

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Developing and practicing a home fire escape plan that everyone understands can mean the difference between life and death. Fire can grow and spread through your home very quickly. It's important that you be prepared to react as soon as the smoke alarm sounds.

### Facts & figures

- Only one-fifth to one-fourth of households (23%) have actually developed and practiced a home fire escape plan to ensure they could escape quickly and safely.
- In 2003, there were an estimated 388,500 reported home structure fires and 3,145 associated civilian deaths in the United States.

Nearly half (44%) of American households who made an estimate thought they would have at least 6 minutes before a fire in their home would become life-threatening. The time available is often less. And only 8% said their first thought on hearing a smoke alarm would be to get out!

### Safety tips

These tips can help you put together – and practice – an effective home fire escape plan.

- Pull together everyone in your household and make a plan. [Draw a floor plan of your home](#) showing two ways out of each room, including windows. Don't forget to mark the location of each smoke alarm.
  - Test all smoke alarms monthly to ensure that they work. Replace batteries as needed.
  - Make sure that everyone understands the escape plan and recognizes the sound of the smoke alarm. Are the escape routes clear? Can doors and windows be opened easily?
  - If windows or doors in your home have security bars, make sure that the bars have quick-release mechanisms
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on the inside so that they can be opened immediately in an emergency. Quick-release mechanisms won't compromise your security – but they will increase your chances of safely escaping a home fire.

- Practice the escape plan at least twice a year, making sure that everyone is involved – from kids to grandparents. Allow children to master fire escape planning and practice before holding a fire drill at night when they are sleeping. The objective is to practice, not to frighten, so telling children there will be a drill before they go to bed can be as effective as a surprise drill. If children or others do not readily waken to the sound of the smoke alarm, or if there are infants or family members with mobility limitations, make sure that someone is assigned to assist them in fire drill and in the event of an emergency.
  - Agree on an outside meeting place where everyone can meet after they've escaped. Remember to get out first, then call for help. Never go back inside until the fire department gives the OK.
  - Have everyone memorize the emergency phone number of the fire department. That way any member of the household can call from a cellular phone or a neighbor's home.
  - Be fully prepared for a real fire: when a smoke alarm sounds, get out immediately. And once you're out, stay out – leave the firefighting to the professionals!
  - If you live in an apartment building, make sure that you're familiar with the building's evacuation plan. In case of a fire, use the stairs, never the elevator.
  - Tell guests or visitors to your home about your family's fire escape plan. When visiting other people's homes, ask about their escape plan. If they don't have a plan in place, offer to help them make one.
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