

FIRE SAFETY IN YOUR HOME CARING FOR SENIORS



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of Fire & Emergency Services



Every year more than 1000 home fires cause around \$10 million in damage and the loss of many irreplaceable personal possessions.

In the past six years, fifteen people over the age of 60 have died in home fires, many were overcome by smoke and toxic fumes.

You are at a higher risk from fires starting in your home as:

- You may not be able to move as quickly
- Your sight or hearing may be impaired. Some medications you are taking may impact on your reaction time
- You may live alone and there is a lack of immediate assistance
- You can improve your safety by taking a few simple steps.



1 Install Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms can save lives and limit damage to homes. Every home should have a working smoke alarm.

- The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) recommends installation of a photo-electric smoke alarm, preferably 240 volt mains powered
- Choosing the correct smoke alarms and installing them properly means house fires can be detected earlier and provide you more time to escape safely
- A 240 volt, mains powered, photo-electric smoke alarm is the best with a rechargeable battery backup that does not need to be changed for the life of the smoke alarm. This type of alarm can detect smoke faster compared to older models. These must be installed by a licensed electrician
- You should choose smoke alarms that carry the Australian Standards mark

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New smoke alarm legislation requires homes and rental properties have mains powered smoke alarms professionally installed before they can be sold or tenanted.

- A range of smoke alarms are available for those with hearing impairments
- The best level of protection can be gained by installing smoke alarms in each bedroom, in corridors and hallways that lead to exits and the living area
- Smoke alarms should be interconnected so when one alarm goes off, the other alarms will sound too, providing a warning throughout the home. This means you will be alerted to a fire no matter where it starts and where you are in the home.
- Check the use by date of your smoke alarm and replace it on or before that date
- Test your smoke alarm every month
- Check your smoke alarm by pressing the test button
- Use a broom handle if you cannot reach
- Hold down the button until you hear the loud alert tone, then release. You may need to press the button again to turn off the alarm.

The key smoke alarm maintenance routines are:

Maintain Your Smoke Alarms

2 For smoke alarms to remain effective they must be tested and maintained regularly.

- Mains powered smoke alarms and battery powered smoke alarms with a 9 volt battery should be replaced every year. You can replace these batteries yourself
- Long life lithium battery powered smoke alarms cannot be opened and the smoke alarm must be replaced every 10 years
- All smoke alarms have a use by date (usually 10 years from date of manufacture)
- Check your smoke alarm for a build up of dust and cobwebs and clean with a vacuum cleaner at least every six months
- Vacuum with a soft brush attachment around the smoke alarm vents
- Use a surface insect spray around the smoke alarm to prevent insects nesting inside it
- Never paint over or cover your smoke alarm.



3 Take Care When Cooking

Many house fires start in the kitchen, so be extra careful when cooking.

- If you must leave the kitchen while cooking, turn off the elements or burners on your stove
- Keep tea towels away from heating elements or burners
- Avoid wearing clothes with loose dangling sleeves when cooking as these can easily catch fire
- If your kitchen floor has a slippery surface, place a non slip mat in front of the stove to prevent accidents
- Avoid burns from spattering fats by heating oils gradually and taking extra care when preparing deep fried food
- Turn all saucepan handles inward
- Place a suitable metal tray or a wooden chopping board away from the stove so if a fire starts it can be used to smother the fire by placing it carefully over the pot. Alternatively, consider buying a fire blanket
- Never throw water on burning fat or oil as it will explode and cause the fire to spread.

4 Take Care With Heating

Home heating is also a major cause of fires in the home.

- Heaters should be checked once a year to make certain they are in good working order
- Worn electrical cords and plugs should be replaced immediately
- Never overload power points. The safest rule is one point = one plug
- Chimneys and flues should be cleaned before their first use at the start of winter
- Open fires should be guarded by a fine mesh screen whenever they are lit. Make sure the fire is completely out before going to bed
- It is advisable to put a screen in front of other heating devices
- All flammable material should be at least one metre away from heaters and open fires
- Some heaters like bar radiators are best fixed to the wall in a suitable location.



5 Take Care When Smoking

After kitchen fires, the next biggest cause of house fires is from smoking materials.

- If you feel drowsy while reading or watching television, put out your cigarette. Be particularly careful if you are taking medication which may make you drowsy
- Use large deep ashtrays with wide rims and avoid resting them on the arms of sofas or chairs
- Be sure that the contents of ashtrays are extinguished before disposing of them, if necessary dampen the contents.



6 Take Care With Electric Blankets

Electric blankets keep us nice and warm during cold winter nights, but they need to be used correctly so they do not become a fire hazard.

- Use and maintain electric blankets in accordance with manufacturer's instructions
- Make sure your electric blanket is turned off when you leave the house
- Never place heavy objects on top of the bed when the blanket is switched on
- Always store electric blankets hanging up or rolled. Folding the blanket can damage the heating wires and cause a fire
- Turn the blanket on prior to going to bed and turn it off when retiring for the night
- Electric blankets are not suitable for persons suffering incontinence
- Replace the blankets after ten years or if you find excessive wear.

7 Getting Out of Your Home in an Emergency

If a fire does start in your home you need to be able to escape as quickly as possible. Spend a few minutes thinking about how you would leave your home.

- Identify more than one way out of your house and every room (including windows)
- Practice the best way to get out. Try crawling with your eyes closed to your nearest exit as this is what it will be like in a fire
- Make sure that all windows, doors and security screens can be easily opened from inside. Keep keys close to locks (but out of sight from being seen through windows)
- If you need to use a wheel chair or walking aid, make sure you can easily get to exits. Always keep passages clear
- Discuss your escape plans with all household members and in multi-accommodation buildings with the building manager and your neighbours. If other people stay overnight, especially children, make sure they all know what to do in case of fire
- Keep your glasses and telephone by your bedside.

8 Dealing With a Fire in Your Home

If a fire does start in your home:

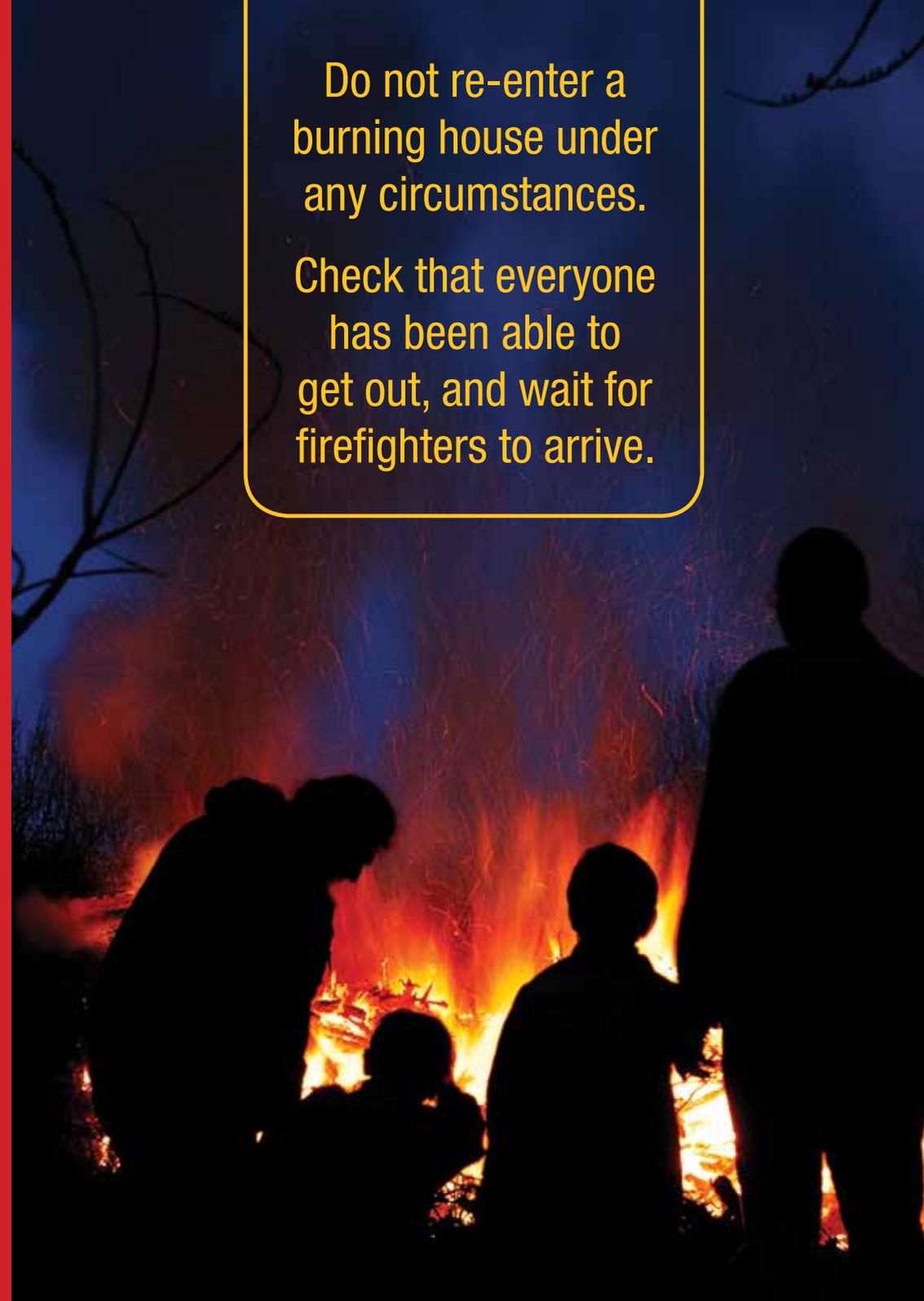
- Alert other people in the house, but only if safe to do so
- If you are unable to easily put out the fire, close the door to contain it to one room and slow it from spreading
- Keep down low, the cleanest air to breathe is close to the floor because smoke rises. Crawl if necessary when moving to the nearest safe exit, staying below one metre
- If you need to pass through a closed door, feel it with the back of your hand before opening. If it is hot use another way to get out
- Leave your home and call triple zero (000) immediately.

Give the following details of your address:

1. Property Number
 2. Street Name
 3. Suburb
 4. Nearest intersection
 5. Any other relevant details
 6. Hang up last
- Alert neighbours as necessary.

Do not re-enter a burning house under any circumstances.

Check that everyone has been able to get out, and wait for firefighters to arrive.



ONLY WORKING SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES

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