

Home Safety Inspection

General Guidelines and Recommendations

ALL AREAS OF THE HOME

RECOMMENDATION: Cords stretched across walkways may cause someone to trip.

- Arrange furniture so that outlets are available for lamps and appliances without the use of extension cords.
- If you must use an extension cord, place it on the floor against a wall where people can not trip over it.
- Move the phone so that telephone cords will not lie where people walk.

RECOMMENDATION: Furniture resting on cords can damage them, creating fire and shock hazards. Electric cords which run under carpeting may cause a fire.

- Remove cords from under furniture or carpeting.
- Replace damaged or frayed cords.

RECOMMENDATION: Nails or staples can damage cords, presenting fire and shock hazards.

- Remove nails, staples, etc.
- Check wiring for damage.
- Use tape to attach cords to walls or floors.

RECOMMENDATION: Damaged cords may cause a shock or fire.

- Replace frayed or cracked cords.

RECOMMENDATION: Overloaded extension cords may cause fires. Standard 18 gauge extension cords can carry 1250 watts.

- If the rating on the cord is exceeded because of the power requirements of one or more appliances being used on the cord, change the cord to a higher rated one or unplug some appliances.
- If an extension cord is needed, use one having a sufficient amp or wattage rating.

RECOMMENDATION: CHECK ALL RUGS, RUNNERS AND MATS

CPSC estimates that in one year, over 2,500 people 65 and over were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries that resulted from tripping over rugs and runners. Falls are also the most common cause of fatal injury for older people.

- Remove rugs and runners that tend to slide.
- Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs and runners.
- Purchase rugs with slip-resistant backing.

- Check rugs and mats periodically to see if backing needs to be replaced.
- Place rubber matting under rugs. (Rubber matting that can be cut to size is available.)
- Purchase new rugs with slip-resistant backing.

NOTE: Over time, adhesive on tape can wear away. Rugs with slip-resistant backing also become less effective as they are washed. Periodically, check rugs and mats to see if new tape or backing is needed.

RECOMMENDATION: In case of emergency, telephone numbers for the Police, Fire Department, and local Poison Control Center, along with a neighbor's number, should be readily available.

- Write the numbers in large print and tape them to the phone, or place them near the phone where they can be seen easily.

RECOMMENDATION: At least one smoke detector should be placed on every floor of your home.

- Read the instructions that come with the smoke detector for advice on the best place to install it.
- Make sure detectors are placed near bedrooms, either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall.
- Locate smoke detectors away from air vents.

RECOMMENDATION: Many home fire injuries and deaths are caused by smoke and toxic gases, rather than the fire itself. Smoke detectors provide an early warning and can wake you in the event of a fire.

- Purchase a smoke detector if you do not have one.
- Check and replace batteries and bulbs according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Vacuum the grillwork of your smoke detector.
- Replace any smoke detectors which can not be repaired.

NOTE: Some fire departments or local governments will provide assistance in acquiring or installing smoke detectors.

RECOMMENDATION: Unusually warm or hot outlets or switches may indicate that an unsafe wiring condition exists.

- Unplug cords from outlets and do not use the switches.
- Have an electrician check the wiring as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATION: A bulb of too high wattage or the wrong type may lead to fire through overheating. Ceiling fixtures, recessed lights, and "hooded" lamps will trap heat.

- Replace with a bulb of the correct type and wattage. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)

RECOMMENDATION: The grounding feature provided by a 3-hole receptacle or an adapter for a 2-hole receptacle is a safety feature designed to lessen the risk of shock.

- Never defeat the grounding feature.
- If you do not have a 3-hole outlet, use an adapter to connect the heater's 3-prong plug. Make sure the adapter ground wire or tab is attached to the outlet.

RECOMMENDATION: Heaters can cause fires or serious burns if they cause you to trip or if they are knocked over.

- Relocate heaters away from passageways and flammable materials such as curtains, rugs, furniture, etc.

RECOMMENDATION: Non-vented heaters should be used with room doors open or window slightly open to provide ventilation. The correct fuel, as recommended by the manufacturer, should always be used. Vented heaters should have proper venting, and the venting system should be checked frequently. Improper venting is the most frequent cause of carbon monoxide poisoning, and older consumers are at special risk.

- Review the installation and operating instructions.
- Call your local fire department if you have additional questions.

CHECK WOODBURNING HEATING EQUIPMENT

RECOMMENDATION: Wood burning stoves should be installed by a qualified person according to local building codes.

- Local building code officials or fire marshals can provide requirements and recommendations for installation.

NOTE: Some insurance companies will not cover fire losses if wood stoves are not installed according to local codes.

CHECK THE EMERGENCY EXIT PLAN

RECOMMENDATION: Once a fire starts, it spreads rapidly. Since you may not have much time to get out and there may be a lot of confusion, it is important that everyone knows what to do.

- Develop an emergency exit plan.
- Choose a meeting place outside your home so you can be sure that everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.
- Practice the plan from time to time to make sure everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.

Remember periodically to re-check your home.

KITCHEN

In the kitchen, check the range area, all electrical cords, lighting, the stool, all throw rugs and mats, and the telephone area.

RECOMMENDATION: Placing or storing non-cooking equipment like potholders, dish towels, or plastic utensils on or near the range can result in fires or burns.

- Store flammable and combustible items away from range and oven.
- Remove any towels hanging on oven handles. If towels hang close to a burner, change the location of the towel rack.
- If necessary, shorten or remove curtains which could brush against heat sources.

RECOMMENDATION: CPSC estimates that 70% of all people who die from clothing fires are over 65 years of age. Long sleeves are more likely to catch fire than are short sleeves. Long sleeves are also more apt to catch on pot handles, overturning pots and pans and causing scalds.

- Roll back long, loose sleeves or fasten them with pins or elastic bands while you are cooking.

RECOMMENDATION: Electrical appliances and power cords can cause shock or electrocution if they come in contact with water. Cords can also be damaged by excess heat.

- Move cords and appliances away from sink areas and hot surfaces.
- Move appliances closer to wall outlets or to different outlets so you won't need extension cords.
- If extension cords must be used, install wiring guides so that cords will not hang near sink, range, or working areas.
- Consider adding new outlets for convenience and safety; ask your electrician to install outlets equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to protect against electric shock. A GFCI is a shock-protection device that will detect electrical fault and shut off electricity before serious injury or death occurs.

RECOMMENDATION: Low lighting and glare can contribute to burns or cuts. Improve lighting by:

- Opening curtains and blinds (unless this causes too much glare).
 - Using the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the fixture. (If you do not know the correct wattage for the fixture, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
 - Reducing glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing the blinds or curtains.
 - Installing additional light fixtures, e.g. under cabinet/over countertop lighting.
- (Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.)

RECOMMENDATION: Standing on chairs, boxes, or other makeshift items to reach high shelves can result in falls.

- If you don't have a step stool, consider buying one. Choose one with a handrail that you can hold onto while standing on the top step.
- Before climbing on any step stool, make sure it is fully opened and stable.
- Tighten screws and braces on the step stool.
- Discard step stools with broken parts.

Remember: Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

LIVING ROOM/FAMILY ROOM

In the living room/family room, check all rugs and runners, electrical and telephone cords, lighting, the fireplace and chimney, the telephone area, and all passageways.

RECOMMENDATION: A clogged chimney can cause a poorly-burning fire to result in poisonous fumes and smoke coming back into the house.

- Do not use the chimney until the blockage has been removed.
- Have the chimney checked and cleaned by a registered or licensed professional.

RECOMMENDATION: Burning wood can cause a build up of a tarry substance (creosote) inside the chimney. This material can ignite and result in a serious chimney fire.

- Have the chimney checked and cleaned by a registered or licensed professional.

RECOMMENDATION: Shadowed or dark areas can hide tripping hazards.

- Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the fixture. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
- Install night lights.
- Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing blinds or curtains.
- Consider using additional lamps or light fixtures. Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.

RECOMMENDATION: Furniture, boxes, or other items could be an obstruction or tripping hazard, especially in the event of an emergency or fire.

- Rearrange furniture to open passageways and walkways.
- Remove boxes and clutter.

Remember: Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

BATHROOM

In the bathroom, check bathtub and shower areas, water temperature, rugs and mats, lighting, small electrical appliances, and storage areas for medications.

CHECK BATHTUB AND SHOWER AREAS

RECOMMENDATION: Wet soapy tile or porcelain surfaces are especially slippery and may contribute to falls.

- Apply textured strips or appliques on the floors of tubs and showers.
- Use non-skid mats in the tub and shower, and on the bathroom floor.

RECOMMENDATION: Grab bars can help you get into and out of your tub or shower, and can help prevent falls.

- Check existing bars for strength and stability, and repair if necessary.
- Attach grab bars, through the tile, to structural supports in the wall, or install bars specifically designed to attach to the sides of the bathtub. If you are not sure how it is done, get someone who is qualified to assist you.

RECOMMENDATION: Water temperature above 120 degrees can cause tap water scalds.

- Lower the setting on your hot water heater to "Low" or 120 degrees. If you are unfamiliar with the controls of your water heater, ask a qualified person to adjust it for you. If your hot water system is controlled by the landlord, ask the landlord to consider lowering the setting.

NOTE: If the water heater does not have a temperature setting, you can use a thermometer to check the temperature of the water at the tap.

- Always check water temperature by hand before entering bath or shower.
- Taking baths, rather than showers, reduces the risk of a scald from suddenly changing water temperatures.

RECOMMENDATIONS: A light switch near the door will prevent you from walking through a dark area.

- Install a night light. Inexpensive lights that plug into outlets are available.
- Consider replacing the existing switch with a "glow switch" that can be seen in the dark.

CHECK SMALL ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

RECOMMENDATION: Even an appliance that is not turned on, such as a hairdryer, can be potentially hazardous if it is left plugged in. If it falls into water in a sink or bathtub while plugged in, it could cause a lethal shock.

- Unplug all small appliances when not in use.
- Never reach into water to retrieve an appliance that has fallen in without being sure the appliance is unplugged.
- Install a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) in your bathroom outlet to protect against electric shock.

CHECK MEDICATIONS

RECOMMENDATION: Medications that are not clearly and accurately labeled can be easily mixed up. Taking the wrong medicine or missing a dosage of medicine you need can be dangerous.

- Be sure that all containers are clearly marked with the contents, doctor's instructions, expiration date, and patient's name.
- Dispose of outdated medicines properly.
- Request non-child-resistant closures from your pharmacist only when you cannot use child-resistant closures.

NOTE: Many poisonings occur when children visiting grandparents go through the medicine cabinet or grandmother's purse. In homes where grandchildren or other youngsters are frequent visitors, medicines should be purchased in containers with child-resistant caps, and the caps properly closed after each use. Store medicines beyond the reach of children.

Remember: Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

BEDROOMS

In the bedroom, check all rugs and runners, electrical and telephone cords, and areas around beds.

RECOMMENDATION: Lamps or switches located close to each bed will enable people getting up at night to see where they are going.

- Rearrange furniture closer to switches or move lamps closer to beds.
- Install night lights.

RECOMMENDATION: Burns are a leading cause of accidental death among seniors. Smoking in bed is a major contributor to this problem. Among mattress and bedding fire related deaths in a recent year, 42% were to persons 65 or older.

- Remove sources of heat or flame from areas around beds.
- Don't smoke in bed.

RECOMMENDATION: Never go to sleep with a heating pad if it is turned on because it can cause serious burns even at relatively low settings.

RECOMMENDATION: In case of an emergency, it is important to be able to reach the telephone without getting out of bed.

Remember: Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

BASEMENT/GARAGE/WORKSHOP/STORAGE AREAS

In the basement, garage, workshop, and storage areas, check lighting, fuse boxes or circuit breakers, appliances and power tools, electrical cords, and flammable liquids.

CHECK LIGHTING

RECOMMENDATION: Power tools are involved in over 5,000 injuries treated in hospital emergency rooms to people 65 and over. Three fourths of these were finger injuries. Good lighting can reduce the chance that you will accidentally cut your finger.

- Either install additional light, or avoid working with power tools in the area.

RECOMMENDATION: Basement, garages, and storage areas can contain many tripping hazards and sharp or pointed tools that can make a fall even more hazardous.

- Keep an operating flashlight handy.
- Have an electrician install switches at each entrance to a dark area.

CHECK THE FUSE BOX OR CIRCUIT BREAKERS

RECOMMENDATION: Replacing a correct size fuse with a larger size fuse can present a serious fire hazard. If the fuse in the box is rater higher than that intended for the circuit, excessive current will be allowed to flow and possibly overload the outlet and house wiring to the point that a fire can begin.

- Be certain that correct-size fuses are used. (If you do not know the correct sizes, consider having an electrician identify and label the sizes to be used.)

NOTE: If all, or nearly all, fuses used are 30-amp fuses, there is a chance that some of the fuses are rated too high for the circuit.

CHECK APPLIANCES AND POWER TOOLS

RECOMMENDATION: These safety features reduce the risk of an electric shock.

- Use a properly connected 3-prong adapter for connecting a 3- prong plug to a 2-hole receptacle.
- Consider replacing old tools that have neither a 3-prong plug nor are double insulated.

RECOMMENDATION: Power tools used with guards removed pose a serious risk of injury from sharp edges or moving parts.

- Replace guards that have been removed from power tools.

RECOMMENDATION: Improperly grounded appliances can lead to electric shock.

- Check with your service person or an electrician if you are in doubt.

CHECK FLAMMABLE AND VOLATILE LIQUIDS

RECOMMENDATION: If not tightly closed, vapors may escape that may be toxic when inhaled.

- Check containers periodically to make sure they are tightly closed.

NOTE: CPSC has reports of several cases in which gasoline, stored as much as 10 feet from a gas water heater, exploded. Many people are unaware that gas fumes can travel that far.

RECOMMENDATION: Gasoline, kerosene, and other flammable liquids should be stored out of living areas in properly labeled, non- glass safety containers.

- Remove these products from the areas near heat or flame such as heaters, furnaces, water heaters, ranges, and other gas appliances.

STAIRS

For all stairways, check lighting, handrails, and the condition of the steps and coverings.

RECOMMENDATION: Stairs should be lighted so that each step, particularly the step edges, can be clearly

seen while going up and down stairs. The lighting should not produce glare or shadows along the stairway.

- Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the light fixture. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
- Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing blinds and curtains.
- Have a qualified person add additional light fixtures. Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.

RECOMMENDATION: Even if you are very familiar with the stairs, lighting is an important factor in preventing falls. You should be able to turn on the lights before you use the stairway from either end.

- If no other light is available, keep an operating flashlight in a convenient location at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Install night lights at nearby outlets.
- Consider installing switches at the top and bottom of the stairs.