



Home fire safety fact sheet

The Elderly And People With Disabilities

There is a higher risk of being injured or not surviving a fire in the home for those in the community who are elderly or those with disabilities. To minimise the risk of fire and/or injuries and fatalities, the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) provides the following information to assist older people and people in the community living with disabilities.

Early Detection And Warning

Research shows that most fatalities occur in house fires where the smoke alarms are not maintained, poorly located or missing altogether.

Working smoke alarms that are well maintained and correctly located give early warning of a fire. This early warning ensures occupants have time to escape a house fire unharmed as time is critical for older people or those with disabilities.

The MFS recommends that the best protection across a range of fires is provided by smoke alarms which are hard-wired to the 240 volt power supply. MFS recommends the installation of interconnected smoke alarms and additional smoke alarms in all sleeping areas. If one alarm detects smoke, all interconnected alarms will activate to alert occupants.

For those who are deaf or hard of hearing, there are specialised smoke alarm systems available that incorporate strobe lights and vibrating elements in addition to the audible alert signal.

If you are dependent on others for movement (e.g. paraplegic), a smoke alarm system can be interfaced with equipment that will send a pre-recorded message or signal to your service provider so that the fire service and a designated carer can be immediately notified to respond.

Consider installing a home fire sprinkler system so that the spread of a fire and fire damage is limited until the arrival of the fire service. If building a home, plan to incorporate sprinklers into the build. Ensure that this system complies with the Australian Standard, Home Fire Sprinkler System AS 2118.5.

Discuss And Plan Your Escape Before You Need To Enact It

The installation of working smoke alarms is the first critical step in having a Home Fire Escape Plan. It is vitally important that people with reduced mobility know to evacuate immediately, at the first sign of fire, rather than trying to extinguish it. Call triple zero (000) as soon as possible after evacuating and when safe to do so.

MFS recommends that family, carers, friends and/or neighbours are included in the Home Fire Escape Plan discussion so that they can assist and/or identify any improvements.

Plan Your Escape Around Abilities Within Your Control:

- Locate your bedroom close to an exit, and if you live in a multi-storey building, it is safer if you locate your bedroom on the ground floor.
- Keep your bedroom and escape route clear of clutter with good access around your bed and doorways.
- Store aids such as glasses, walking frame, wheelchair etc. in easy reach of your bed, and ensure you can get through all doorways quickly and easily in the event of an emergency.
- Keep a mobile phone and torch beside your bed when you go to sleep at night. Remember that if the power to the house fails, a cordless phone requiring electrical power is likely to fail as well.
- If you have a personal alarm, wear it in bed or keep it close to the bed while you sleep.
- Consider leaving all internal doors open at night for easy escape.
- When you are home, always leave your keys in deadlocked doors or security screens.
- Know how to get down as low as you can to stay out of the smoke as you evacuate.
- Consider building a ramp, installing handrails or tactile ground surface indicators to help you evacuate.
- Ensure every occupant of the home knows where the agreed meeting place is. Never re-enter a burning building. Get out and stay out.
- Ensure every occupant knows how to call triple zero (000) or to get a neighbour to do this for you once you are out of the home.

For Those Who Cannot Self-Mobilise Without Assistance The Following Advice Is Provided:

- At the first sign of fire, phone triple zero (000), wait for the operator and ask for FIRE, wait to be connected and tell them you have a fire and need evacuation assistance.
- Stay on the phone so you can tell them where to find you.
- Get down as low in the room as you can to stay out of the smoke and heat.
- If you can, close the door to the room you are in and place towels, bedding and/or clothing against the bottom of the door to reduce smoke entering the room.
- If safe to do so, and if you can, open an outside window slightly and using a brightly coloured cloth or a torch during non-daylight time, and try to signal your location. **If smoke is coming in through the open window you must close it immediately.**

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Tips To Prevent Or Reduce The Risk Of Fires And Burn Injuries:

General

- Ensure you have a plan to keep your smoke alarms in good working order. Refer to the MFS Home Fire & Life Safety fact sheet [Smoke Alarm Servicing Schedule](#).
- Evacuate at the first sign of fire or as soon as a smoke alarm sounds.
- Ensure all occupants know what to do if a person's clothing catches fire: Stop, Cover, Drop and Roll.
- Seek medical attention if a burn is larger than a 50-cent coin, or if it is on the face, hands, feet, joints or groin area.
- Keep matches and lighters out of sight and well out of reach of children.
- If you use medical oxygen, always follow the safety advice provided by your supplier. Failure to do so can increase the likelihood of a fire and increase the intensity.
- Ensure your address or house number is clearly marked and visible.

Kitchens

- Never use water to extinguish a fat / oil fire. If it is safe to do so use a fire blanket or fire extinguisher.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Turn pot and cooking utensil handles inward so that children can't reach them.

Living Rooms

- Never leave candles burning unattended, even if you leave the room for a short time, extinguish the candle first.
- Always use sturdy candleholders and place them on a secure piece of heat-resistant furniture, well away from flammable items such as curtains and paper.
- Never run extension cords under carpet or furniture. Heat generated through use cannot escape and a fire may start.

Bedrooms

- Always take care using electric blankets, never get into bed without turning them off beforehand.
- Never use therapeutic wheat bags as bed warmers and always allow them to cool on a non-combustible surface.

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Electrical And Electronic Devices

- Consider installing a Residual Current Device, or as it is sometimes referred to, a Safety Switch to all electrical circuits for additional life safety protection.
- Use electrical items and appliances in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
- Ensure devices and appliances are regularly serviced and maintained by a licensed technician.
- Never overload power boards and never use double adaptors or power boards piggy-backed onto each other.
- Do not use or charge electronic devices on beds or soft furnishings. Do not place anything on, or cover a device that is being used or charged.

Heating And Cooling

- Ensure heating and cooling equipment is installed, maintained and regularly serviced by a qualified tradesperson, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Do not leave your heating or cooling equipment running unattended while not at home.
- If you notice signs that heating or cooling equipment is overheating, immediately turn them off and have them checked.
- Clean chimneys and flues regularly.
- Place a mesh guard in front of open fires.
- Choose portable heaters and cooling appliances which have automatic safety switches to turn them off if they are knocked over.
- Keep anything that can burn ideally two metres away from any part of heaters and open fires.

Smoking Hazards

- Ensure smokers always use deep, sturdy ashtrays.
- Always thoroughly extinguish cigarette butts and matches prior to disposing of them in an outside bin.
- Smoking, alcohol and fatigue are deadly when combined. Before going to sleep, check nothing has lodged in chairs or bedding where smokers have been.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Never leave lit cigarettes unattended.

Combine the above safety tips with the installation of well maintained, photo-electric [smoke alarms](#) in your home that are less than 10 years old. Consider having all your smoke alarms interconnected.