

Winter Home Fire Safety Tips

Although structural fires can happen accidentally, there are still a number of risk factors that can raise the chances of a fire breaking out inside a building. During the winter, homes are especially susceptible to fires. Follow these winter fire safety tips to keep your home fire free during the cold season:

- Keep portable generators outside, away from windows and as far away as possible from your house.
- Keep grills, cookers and fryers at least 3 feet away from your house and shrubs or bushes. If you're a building manager, prohibit barbecues on balconies – they can easily cause fires as well as smoke damage to other units.
- Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything flammable, as heat can quickly cause combustion. Always turn off heaters when leaving the room or going to bed. Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Have your chimneys, fireplaces, wood stoves and central furnace serviced once a year. Make sure all flames have been put out before going to sleep. Store cooled ashes in a tightly covered metal container and keep it outside at least 10 feet from your home and nearby buildings.
- Blow out all candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Avoid the use of candles in the bedroom and other areas where people may fall asleep. Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn.
- Use ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) in all electrical outlets in kitchens, bathrooms and other wet areas. Don't run extension cords across doorways or under carpets, make sure to use tamper-resistant receptacles if you have children, and don't overload outlets or extension cords. Building managers should respond promptly to any reports of sparking or faulty wiring.
- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the structure. Test them monthly, and change batteries at least once per year for those with replaceable batteries. Smoke detectors should be replaced every 10 years.
- Create multiple escape plans and practice them with your family. Your plans should include escape routes from different areas of the house, tools for exiting the building (escape ladders and break out windows) and a designated meeting place. It's very important to practice fire safety with kids, and be sure to familiarize your children with the sounds of the alarm(s).
- Store a fire extinguisher on every level of your home. Fire extinguishers should be placed by exits whenever possible. It's also a good idea to have an extinguisher in your garage. Home fire extinguishers should have an ABC rating, making them usable for all types of fires. Though you should only consider using a fire extinguisher when a blaze is in the early stages—small and contained—they can be crucial in preventing significant destruction, and managing dangerous situations.

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