

Enumclaw Fire Department
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The facts speak for themselves: People over the age of 65 are one of the groups at greatest risk of dying in a fire. Every year more than 1,000 people over age 65 die in fires. People over the age of 80 die in fires at a rate three times higher than the rest of the population. Many of these fatalities occur where there is no working smoke detector. However, there are a number of precautionary steps senior citizens can take to dramatically reduce their chances of becoming a fire casualty.

Understanding The Risks

Why are senior citizens at a higher risk? There are a number of reasons. They may be less able to take the quick action necessary in a fire emergency. They may be on medication that affects their ability to make quick decisions. Many older people live alone and when accidents happen others may not be around to help.

What Fire Hazards Affect Older People?

Cooking accidents are the leading cause of fire related injuries for older people. The kitchen is one of the most active and potentially dangerous rooms in the home. Cooking can mean danger where a loose sleeve could catch fire from the stove, or a pot left on a burner can become a major fire if forgotten.

Unsafe use of smoking materials is the leading cause of fire deaths among older people. Often, medication can lead to drowsiness.

Heating equipment is responsible for a big share of fires in seniors' homes. Caution should be used with alternate heaters such as wood stoves or electric space heaters. Too often the heaters become a fire hazard, particularly when newspapers and other combustibles are nearby.

Faulty wiring is another major cause of fires affecting the elderly. Older homes can have serious wiring problems, ranging from old appliances with bad wiring to overloaded sockets.

Kitchen Fires

- Most kitchen fires occur because food is left unattended on the stove or in the oven. If you must leave the kitchen while cooking, turn off the burners and take a spoon or potholder with you to remind you to return to the kitchen.
- Never cook with loose, dangling sleeves. Robes and other loose-fitting garments can ignite easily.
- Grease is extremely flammable; keep all cooking surfaces clean. Heat cooking oils gradually and use extra caution when deep-frying.
- If a fire breaks out in a pan, put a lid on the pan. Never throw water on a grease fire.
- Turn pot handles toward the side of the range, and always use a potholder when reaching for handles.
- Never use a range or stove to heat your home.

Space Heaters

- Buy only UL-approved heaters.
- Check your heaters often to make sure they are in good condition.
- Burning fuel can produce deadly fumes; only use them in well-ventilated areas. Use only the manufacturer's recommended fuel for each heater.
- Do not use electric space heaters in the bathroom or around other wet areas.
- Do not dry or store objects on top of your heater.
- Always keep combustibles away from heat sources.

Extension Cords

- Regularly inspect your extension cords for fraying, exposed wires or loose plugs. They are not intended for use as permanent wiring. Unplug them when not in use. If you need to plug in two or three appliances, do not use a simple extension cord. It's better to get a UL-approved unit that has built-in circuit breakers.
- Never run electric cords or extensions under rugs or in high traffic areas.
- Avoid the "electric octopus" or using three-way adapters to create more outlets.

Smoking

- Don't leave smoking materials unattended.
- Don't put ashtrays on arms of sofas or chairs where they can be easily knocked over.
- Use safety ashtrays with wide lips.
- Empty all ashtrays into the toilet or a metal container every night before going to bed.
- Never smoke in bed. Burning sheets and blankets may create a fire from which escape may be impossible.
- Use caution when taking medication that causes drowsiness.

The Enumclaw Fire Department distributes free smoke detectors every year. If you need a smoke detector, if you need help with installation or if you have a question, contact the fire department at 360-825-5544.