

SAFE AT

20 WAYS TO ACCIDENT-PROOF YOUR HOUSE

By Sari Harrar

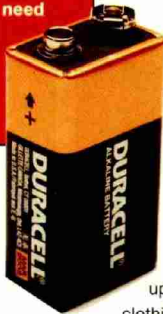
Each year, 21 million Americans get hurt—and 18,500 are killed—in home accidents, yet 97 percent of us believe our homes are havens.

"It's easy to be lulled into a sense of false security; when days and years go by and nothing bad happens, we begin to think nothing ever could," says Meri-K Appy, president of the nonprofit, Washington, DC-based Home Safety Council. "But the truth is, accidents happen all the time, and most don't have to. We're not struggling to find a cure for this killer—we know how to make homes safe. And it just takes a few minutes."



WHOLE-HOUSE FIRE SAFETY

While 90 percent of American homes have smoke alarms, one in four doesn't work due to dead or missing batteries. Why you need several: Flames can engulf a room within 3 minutes—and an entire house in 5 to 10 minutes.



1 Install at least one smoke detector on each floor of your home—and one in or near each sleeping area. Test them monthly by pressing the Test button. Install fresh batteries every six months. Replace detectors that are more than 10 years old.

ing somewhere in the house, basement, or garage. While most interconnected systems run on electricity and may require a costly installation, there's at least one battery-operated system on the market: The Kidde Wireless Smoke Alarm (www.kiddewireless.com; \$68 per unit).

3 Go "dual sensor." Some battery-powered smoke alarms are equipped with both an ionization sensor for high-flame fires (burning paper, cooking oil, or flammable chemicals) and a photoelectric sensor for smoky fires (smoldering upholstered furniture, bedding, and clothing). Many brands are available for \$25 to \$30 apiece.



2 Upgrade to a wireless interconnected system. With this system, all the alarms sound if one detects a problem, giving you extra time to flee from a fire smolder-

4 Invest in fire extinguishers. Keep all-purpose, easy-to-operate extinguishers in high fire-risk areas including the kitchen, garage, basement, and near your furnace and hot-water heater. The First Alert Tundra Fire Extinguishing Spray (\$30; www.firstalert.com), operates like an aerosol can (no pin to pull) and works on paper, fabric, wood, cooking oil, and electrical fires. Manufacturer research says it sprays an area three times wider than regular home extinguishers, and sprays four times longer.



5 Inspect existing extinguishers. Recharge or replace if the gauge doesn't say "100%"; replace any non-rechargeable extinguishers more than 7 years old. A fire extinguisher is designated only to fight small fires—if flames are big, get out.



Fire escape routes



6 Create a family escape plan—and practice it. Draw a map of your house and find at least two escape routes out of every room. Plan to wake up the kids; studies show that many sleep through even the loudest smoke alarms. Designate an outdoor meeting place (you'll call 911 when everyone's out.) Go to www.homesafetycouncil.org for a printable fire safety worksheet.

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KITCHEN

7 Put a fire extinguisher within 10 feet of your stove. Thirty percent of all home fires start in the kitchen.

8 Plug in a rechargeable flashlight. Save it strictly for emergencies and power outages.

9 Don't overload outlets or extension cords. Plugging in too many appliances or appliances with too much wattage (such as coffeemakers and microwaves) can overheat cords or

pop circuit breakers or fuses. Don't exceed the maximum capacity of an extension cord.

10 Get a smoke alarm with a hush button. If your famous Cajun chicken makes the frying pan smoke, you can silence this alarm temporarily instead of removing the battery (and forgetting to reinsert it later).

11 Post emergency numbers by your kitchen phone. An old-fashioned plug-in (i.e., not wireless) phone will function during a power outage. Keep all emergency numbers by the phone, and keep copies beside other phones in your home, as well.

LIVING ROOM

12 Attach tall furniture to wall studs. Bookcases, curio cabinets, and TVs on high shelves can topple if little kids try to climb or cling to them. Furniture wall straps (\$5; www.securityworld.com) can help keep objects that weigh over 200 pounds from tipping.

13 Install carbon monoxide monitors.

Odorless carbon monoxide—emitted by fuel-burning appliances, including stoves, clothes dryers, heaters, fireplaces, and woodstoves (even a car idling in an attached garage)—kills 600 people each year. Protection is as cheap as a \$30 to \$60 alarm, yet fewer than one in three American homes have them. Look for one with an 85-decibel alarm, a digital display, and a Test/Reset button. Get a plug-in model with battery backup and test it monthly. Put one on each level of your home and in the hall outside sleeping areas; if bedrooms are far apart, have one in each room.

14 Reroute and roll up extension cords. Run cords around the edges of rooms. Keep extra-long cords neatly rolled up with a Cord Turtle (\$5 to \$10; www.cableorganizer.com)

BATHROOM

15 Cool off sizzling water. Hot water burns like fire—at 140°F, it can cause second- and third-degree burns in just 6 seconds (and in just 3 seconds for thinner-skinned kids and older folks). Set your hot water heater temp to 120°F and install scald-stopping tub faucets and showerheads. We like the H2OSTOP by American Valve (\$24 to \$43; available at Lowe's or www.h2ostop.com). Sensors cut water flow to a trickle if the temperature tops 120°F.

17 Install grab bars. Never depend on a shower door handle or a towel bar to support your weight as you get in and out of a tub or shower. Follow the directions for securely anchoring the bars to the walls—or hire a professional to make sure it's done correctly.

16 Get a grip on slips. Always use a grippy bathmat or attach pretty nonslip decals to the tub floor, like those from Slip-X Solutions (\$5 per pack of five or six; www.slipxsolutions.com).

18 Stow remedies out of reach. Eight in 10 families with young children say they leave medicines where kids can get to them. That's one reason poisonings are the second leading cause of deaths from home injuries in the United States. Keep all meds in the original containers with childproof lids, and store all pills and other medications in a locked cabinet or drawer.

BEDROOMS

19 Use "vocal smoke alarms" in kids' rooms. Studies show that even extra-loud smoke alarms may not wake kids, especially those under 10. Consider an alarm that uses high-pitched beeps plus voice instructions that you record. Some research suggests a parent or caregiver's voice wakes kids faster.

20 Stash an escape ladder or two. Position a pre-assembled, flame-resistant safety escape ladder near a window in at least one bedroom (if rooms are far apart, put one in each). Try the Kidde Escape ladder (\$50; www.firesafetysource.com). **BHL** Regular contributor Sari Harrar always plays it safe at home.

