

Maryland State Fire Marshal

News Release

Martin O'Malley
Governor

William E. Barnard
State Fire Marshal



FIRE SAFETY AWARENESS FOR AGING ADULTS

PIKESVILLE, MD (December 14, 2012) – In response to recent fire activity involving senior citizens, the State Fire Marshal William E. Barnard requests aging Marylanders to take special precautions to protect themselves from the potential of injury or even death resulting from scald burns and fire related injuries. *“The aging process can be difficult enough without having to recover from injuries related to smoke and thermal burns”*, stated Barnard. *“Everyone needs to assume responsibility and take the initiative to protect themselves from needless injuries resulting from these hazardous issues.”*

Aging adults are a fast growing segment of the American society and are at a serious risk of receiving long term injuries and possibly death from exposure to smoke and high heat conditions. The inability to escape the effects of fire because of physical limitations and/or use of medications is of considerable concern, thereby, performing safe practices and having an escape plan are essential to quality of life. By practicing scald and fire safety tips, aging adults can reduce their chance of encountering a debilitating injury or death. Please follow the listed tips and guidelines to help protect you from a fire or burn related injury.

Before a Fire Occurs

Identify the Nearest Emergency Exit

Whether you are at home or elsewhere, you should always know the location of the nearest exit. This could save your life in an emergency.

Heed Fire Safety and Design Guidelines

Walkways and doorways should accommodate any mobility impairment an individual may have. For example, doorways should accommodate a wheelchair’s width, and flooring material should accommodate artificial limbs, walkers, or canes.

Install and Test Smoke Alarms

One important step you can take to save your life during a fire is to install a smoke alarm that suits your needs. A working smoke alarm can make a vital difference in the event of a fire and may reduce the risk of dying in a fire by as much as 60 percent. A properly functioning alarm can alert you to the presence of deadly smoke while there is still time to escape. Place alarms in each sleeping area and on every floor of your home. Keep smoke alarms clean by vacuuming or having them vacuumed regularly. Test the

alarm function monthly, and replace the batteries annually. Ask friends, family members, building managers, or someone from the fire department to install and test the batteries of a smoke alarm if it is hard to reach. When replacing battery only smoke alarms, consider having 10-year lithium battery alarms installed. If your smoke alarms are hardwired (connected to the electric circuitry of your residence), make sure they are also equipped with battery backups. Aging smoke alarms may not operate efficiently and often are the source for nuisance alarms. Smoke alarms should be replaced every 10 years to ensure optimal effectiveness.

Residential Fire Sprinklers

Residential fire sprinklers are a proven life saving device in the event a fire occurs. The quick action of these life saving devices provides the additional time needed to escape the effects of fire. In many cases, a single fire sprinkler head activates and extinguishes the fire prior to the arrival of the fire department. Consider living in a home protected by residential fire sprinklers.

Have a Fire Extinguisher and Learn How To Use It

If you are confined to a wheelchair, consider mounting (or having someone mount) a small “personal use” fire extinguisher in an accessible place on your wheelchair and become familiar with its use. Then, if you cannot “stop, drop, and roll” during a fire, you should “pull, aim, squeeze, and sweep.”

Live Near an Exit

If you live in an apartment building, try to get an apartment on the ground floor. If this is not possible, know where the exit stairwell is and plan to wait there for help if you cannot take the stairs in the event of a fire.

If you live in a multi-story house, try to sleep on the ground floor

Make sure a phone (or a TTY/TDD if you use one) is next to your bed, within arm’s reach. Keep emergency telephone numbers and hearing aids (if necessary) handy as well. If necessary, construct an exit ramp for emergency exits. (Follow local building codes as provided by your building permits office).

Plan and Practice Your Escape Plan

Knowing and practicing your escape plan is one of the most important steps you can take to save your life in a fire.

Plan your escape around your capabilities

Know at least two exits from every room. Make sure you can unlock all your doors and windows. Be sure you know how to open your windows. If security devices, such as bars, are installed across the windows, ensure that they release from the inside. Make any necessary accommodations (such as installation of exit ramps) to facilitate escape.

Involve the Fire Department

Ask the fire department to help you plan an escape route, and inform them of your special needs. Ask the fire department to help identify any fire hazards in your home and explain how to correct them. Any areas you plan to use as a rescue area must be identified and agreed upon by you and officials from the fire department. Learn the fire department’s limitations, and make fire officials aware of yours.

During a Fire

Get Out and Stay Out

Leave your home as soon as possible. Do not try to gather personal possessions or attempt to extinguish a fire. Do not use the elevator. Once out, do not go back inside.

Test the Doors before Opening Them

Using the back of your hand, reach up high and touch the door, the doorknob, and the space between the door and the frame. If anything feels hot, keep the door shut and use your second exit. If everything feels cool, open the door slowly and exit as low to the ground as possible if smoke is present.

Stay Low and Go

Crawl low and keep under the smoke, if you are physically able. If not, try to cover your mouth and nose to avoid breathing toxic fumes, and make your way to safety as quickly as possible.

What to Do If You Are Trapped

Close all the doors between you and the fire. Fill cracks in doors and cover all vents with a damp cloth to keep smoke out. If possible, call the fire department and tell them where you are located. Signal rescuers from a window with a light-colored cloth.

Stop, Drop, and Roll

If any part of you catches fire, do not run and do not try to extinguish the flames with your hands. Cover your face with your hands. Drop to the ground, rolling over and over. If you have a disability that prevents your taking these actions, try to keep a flame-resistant blanket or rug nearby to smother any flames.

Fire and Scald Prevention

Cooking

Never leave the stove unattended while cooking. If you need to step away from the stove, turn it off. Wear tight-fitting clothing when cooking, and keep towels and potholders away from contacting the heat source. If food or grease catches fire, smother the flames by sliding a lid over the pan and turning off the heat. Do not try to use water to extinguish a grease fire. When deep-frying, never fill the pan more than one-third full of oil or fat. If the oil starts to smoke, it is too hot. Use a thermometer to monitor the temperature of the oil. Never put foil or other metals in the microwave. Make sure the stove is kept clean and free of grease buildup. Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove so they cannot be knocked off or pulled down. Check the interior of the oven for stored items before turning it on.

Electrical Safety

Electric blankets should conform to the appropriate standards and have overheating protection. Do not wash blankets repeatedly as this can damage their electrical circuitry. If an appliance begins to smell suspicious or emit smoke, unplug it immediately. Replace all frayed or broken electrical cords. Never use an appliance with exposed wires. Never overload extension cords, and keep them out of traffic areas. Use only electrical appliances evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

Smoking

If choosing to smoke, consider smoking outdoors. Never smoke in bed. Make sure that you are alert when you smoke. If medical oxygen is in use, do not allow smoking anywhere inside the home. Place signage stating that oxygen is in use and warns visitors that smoking is not allowed. Never smoke while using medical oxygen, oxygen enriched hair and clothing can quickly ignite and burn rapidly. Do not smoke while under the influence of alcohol or if you are taking prescription drugs that can cause drowsiness or confusion. Never leave smoking materials unattended, and collect them in large, deep ashtrays. Check around furniture, especially upholstered furniture, for any discarded or smoldering smoking materials. Soak the ashes in the ashtray before discarding them.

Space Heaters

Give space heaters space. Keep heaters at least 3 feet from any combustible material, including people. Follow the manufacturers' directions regarding operation, fueling, and maintenance of your space heater. Do not use heaters or other heating devices to dry clothing.

Heating

Have your heating systems and chimneys checked and cleaned annually by a professional. Never store fuel for heating equipment in the home. Keep fuel outside or in a detached storage area or shed.

Fireplaces

Open fireplaces can be hazardous; they should be covered with tempered glass doors and guarded by a raised hearth 9 to 18 inches high.

Water Heater Temperature Setting

Ensure the water heater temperature is set between 120°-125° to help prevent scald burns from water coming from the tap.

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The Office of the State Fire Marshal is an agency of the Department of State Police dedicated to helping protect citizens from fire and explosion through a comprehensive program of education, inspection, investigation and fire protection engineering. For more information on fire safety call 1-800-525-3124, log onto our website at: www.mdsp.org/firemarshal and/or <http://facebook.com/MarylandStateFireMarshal>.