

Preparedness Bulletin

Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
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COLORADO
Division of Homeland Security
& Emergency Management
Department of Public Safety

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Department of Public Safety
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Office of Emergency Management
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Mission
Provide leadership and support to Colorado communities to prevent, protect, mitigate, respond and recover from all-hazard events including acts of terrorism.

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READYColorado.com

Be prepared for home and structure fires

According to the US Fire Administration, an average of seven people die in U.S. home fires every day. Fires consume 371,700 homes each year. Because home and structure fires are so common, it is extremely important to prepare for these events.

Before a fire

Make a plan

- Create a home fire escape plan and practice it at least twice per year with every person who lives in your home.
- Find two ways to get out of each room.
- Make sure that windows are not stuck, screens can be taken out quickly, and that security bars can be properly opened.
- Practice feeling your way out of the house in the dark or with your eyes closed.
- Teach children not to hide from firefighters.

Install and maintain smoke alarms

- Install both ionization AND photoelectric smoke alarms, OR dual sensor smoke alarms, which contain both ionization and photoelectric smoke sensors.
- Test batteries monthly.
- Replace batteries in battery-powered and hard-wired smoke alarms at least once a year (except non-replaceable 10-year lithium batteries).
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement. The U.S. Fire Administration recommends installing smoke alarms both inside and outside of sleeping areas.
- Always follow the manufacturer's installation instructions when installing smoke alarms.
- Replace the entire smoke alarm unit every 8-10 years or according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Never disable a smoke alarm while cooking – it can be a deadly mistake. Instead, open a window or door and press the “hush” button, wave a towel at the alarm to clear the air, or move the entire alarm several feet away from the location.



During a fire

- Crawl low under any smoke to your exit - heavy smoke and poisonous gases collect first along the ceiling.
- When the smoke alarm sounds, get out fast. You may have only seconds to escape safely.
- Smoke is toxic. If you must escape through smoke, get low and go under the smoke to your way out.
- Before opening a door, feel the doorknob and door. If either is hot, leave the door closed and use your second way out.
- If there is smoke coming around the door, leave the door closed and use your second way out.
- If you open a door, open it slowly. Be ready to shut it quickly if heavy smoke or fire is present.
- If you can't get to someone needing assistance, leave the home and call 9-1-1 or the fire department. Tell the emergency operator where the person is located.
- If pets are trapped inside your home, tell firefighters right away. Do not try to rescue them yourself.
- If you cannot get out, close the door and cover vents and cracks around doors with cloth or tape to keep smoke out. Call 9-1-1 or your fire department. Say where you are and signal for help at the window with a light-colored cloth or a flashlight.

After a fire

- Check with the fire department to make sure your residence is safe to enter. Be watchful of any structural damage caused by the fire.
- The fire department should see that utilities are either safe to use or are disconnected before they leave the site. **DO NOT** attempt to reconnect utilities yourself. Instead, ask your utility provider for assistance.
- If you are insured, contact your insurance company for detailed instructions on protecting the property, conducting inventory and contacting fire damage restoration companies. If you are not insured, try contacting private organizations for aid and assistance.
- Conduct an inventory of damaged property and items. Do not throw away any damaged goods until after an inventory is made.
- If you leave your home, contact the local police department to let them know the site will be unoccupied.
- Begin saving receipts for any money you spend related to fire loss. The receipts may be needed later by the insurance company and for verifying losses claimed on income tax.
- Notify your mortgage company of the fire.

Home fire facts

- Each year, fires cause an average of 2,590 deaths, 12,910 injuries and \$7.2 billion in damage.
- Cooking equipment was the leading cause of home structure fires and injuries.
- Almost two-thirds of home fire deaths in 2006-2010 resulted from fires in homes in which no smoke alarm was present or working.
- According to the NFPA, 42 percent of home fires started in the kitchen, accounting for more than 1/3 of home fire injuries.
- Only seven percent of reported home fires started in the bedroom, but these fires caused one-quarter of home fire deaths and one in five home fire injuries.



- Check with an accountant or the Internal Revenue Service about special benefits for people recovering from fire loss.

Prevention

- Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.
- If you smoke, smoke outside. Most home fires caused by smoking materials start inside the home. Put your cigarettes out in a can filled with sand.
- Frayed wires can cause fires. Replace all worn, old or damaged appliance cords immediately and do not run cords under rugs or furniture.
- Use electrical extension cords wisely; never overload extension cords or wall sockets.
- Immediately shut off, then professionally replace, light switches that are hot to the touch and lights that flicker.
- Keep combustible objects at least three feet away from portable heating devices.
- Check to make the portable heater has a thermostat control mechanism, and will switch off automatically if the heater falls over.
- Inspect and clean woodstove pipes and chimneys annually and check monthly for damage or obstructions.
- Never burn trash, paper, or green wood in a fire place or wood stove.
- Use a fireplace screen heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire opening of the fireplace to catch flying sparks.
- Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed.

For more information

- General preparedness information – www.readycolorado.com
- NFPA home fire fact sheet - http://bit.ly/NFPA_home
- FEMA/USFA “Protecting your family from fire” publication - <http://1.usa.gov/11r8np4>
- Ready campaign home fire information page - <http://1.usa.gov/SBt91B>

General preparedness

- Have a disaster supply kit ready in case of any emergency, including a power outage.
- Make sure your disaster supply kit contains food items that are non-perishable and that do not need to be cooked.
- Make sure you have appropriate clothing, including shoes, for the weather and physical environment where you are located.
- Don’t forget to pack extra batteries in your disaster supply kit for items such as radios and flashlights.
- Make sure you have some cash on hand. ATM machines and credit cards will not work without electricity.