

HOME HAZARD HUNT

By: Chris Floyd
Emergency Services Director
Capital Area Chapter
American Red Cross

During and right after a disaster, any household item that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a home hazard. At least once each year, inspect your home to find and correct potential hazards.

Identifying Hazards

Check for Electrical Hazards

- Replace frayed or cracked extension and appliance cords, loose prongs and plugs.
- Make sure there is only one plug per outlet. Avoid using cube-tabs or overloading outlets. If you must use an extension cord, use a cord that's rated for the electrical load and no longer than is really needed.
- Remove electrical cords that run under rugs or over nails, heaters or pipes.
- Cover exposed outlets and wiring.
- Repair or replace appliances that overheat, short out, smoke or spark.

Check for Chemical Hazards

- Store flammable liquids such as gasoline, acetone, benzene and lacquer thinner in approved safety cans, away from the home. Place containers in a well ventilated area and close the lids tightly. Secure the containers to prevent spills.
- If flammable materials must be stored in the home, use a storage can with an Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM) approved label. Move materials away from heat sources, open flames, gas appliances and children.
- Keep combustible liquids such as paint thinner, kerosene, charcoal lighter fluid and turpentine away from heat sources.
- Store oily waste and polishing rags in covered metal cans.
- Instruct family members not to use gasoline, benzene or other flammable fluids for starting fires or cleaning indoors.

Check for Fire Hazards

- Clear out old rags, papers, mattresses, broken furniture and other combustible materials.
- Move clothes, curtains, rags and paper goods away from electrical equipment, gas appliances or flammable materials.
- Remove dried grass cuttings, tree trimmings and weeds from the property.
- Clean and repair chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors and gas vents.

- Keep heaters and candles away from curtains and furniture.
- Place portable heaters on level surfaces, away from high traffic areas. Purchase portable heaters equipped with automatic shut-off switches and avoid the use of extension cords.

Safety Equipment

Check Fire Safety Equipment

- Install at least one smoke alarm on each level of the home, especially near the bedrooms. Test every month and change batteries at least once a year.
- Keep at least one fire extinguisher (ARC type). Maintain and recharge according to manufacture's instructions. Show all family members where it's kept and how to use it.

Secure Items

Check Items That Can Shift or Fall

- Anchor water heater, large appliances, bookcases, tall or heavy furniture, shelves, mirrors and pictures to wall studs.
- Fit water heater with a flexible gas supply line.
- Place large or heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Install clips, latches or other locking devices on cabinet doors.
- Provide strong support and flexible connections on gas appliances.
- Brace overhead light fixtures.
- Hang heavy items such as pictures and mirrors away from beds and places where people sit.
- Repair any deep cracks in ceilings or foundations.

Utilities

Check Your Utilities

- Locate the main electric fuse or circuit breaker box, water services shut-off and natural gas main shut-off.
- Contact local utility companies for instructions on how to turn off the utilities. Teach family members when and how to turn off utilities.
- Clear area around shut-off switches for easy access.
- Attach shut-off wrench or specialty tool to a pipe or other location close by the gas and water shut-off valves.
- Paint shut-off valves with white or fluorescent paint to increase visibility.

Home Safety

Plan how to escape from your home in the event of an emergency. Identify at least two exits from each room. Clear doors, hallways and stairs of obstructions. Conduct emergency drills. Practice day and nighttime escapes and pick a safe meeting place outside the home.