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The Independent & Free Press Real Estate Digest

Fire safety should be a top priority in your family's home

It only takes an unguarded or careless moment for a fire to start; but its effects can be devastating, even deadly: property destroyed and people robbed of their livelihood or a loved one.

According to the Canada Safety Council, which organizes the annual Fire Prevention Week (Nov. 24 to 30), fire breaks out somewhere in Canada every eight minutes and 10 people are injured or killed by fire everyday. A majority (85%) of these fires occur in homes and most are caused by cooking equipment, smokers' materials or electrical and heating equipment. Safety Council statistics also show that the holiday season has a higher than normal incidence of fire-related deaths.

Fortunately, there are precautions you can, and should take to protect yourself and your property from the ravages of fire. First and foremost, install a smoke and/or heat detector on each level of your home and outside each bedroom. While these devices greatly reduce the risk of perishing in a fire, be

warned: you must test them regularly and replace their batteries once a year.

"If you have a monitored alarm system, it can be hooked up to specially-designed smoke and/or heat

Marketing and Public Relations at ADT Security Services Canada, Inc., a security company that has been in operation for more than 100 years.

To guard against an electrical

And when leaving your apartment exit the building by the nearest stairwell; never use the elevator," cautions Millen.

When purchasing a fire extinguisher, make sure that it can be

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When the cold weather arrives, it's time to be especially vigilant against heat equipment fires. Clean and service your home's heating system and furnace annually and make sure that there's an emergency shut-off switch. When you use the fireplace, always place a screen in front of the opening to protect against flying sparks. Another cold weather fire hazard are space heaters. Don't leave them near combustible materials such as upholstery and drapes.

The Christmas season can be an especially dangerous time for fire. Christmas tree lights can overheat, so always turn them off at night or when you go out. You should also avoid using certain decorating materials such as angel hair and spray-on snowflakes, which are highly flammable.

Should there be a fire, never place yourself or others in jeopardy by attempting to extinguish it. If you can't put it out with a portable extinguisher and smoke starts to build up, leave immediately, making sure to close the door behind you to contain the fire.

If you have a monitored home alarm system hooked up to a specially designed smoke and/or heat detector, you can rest assured that the fire department will have already been notified.

Fire safety checklist

1. Install certified and approved alarms on each level of your home.
2. If you have a monitored alarm system, wire it up to a specially-designed smoke and/or heat detectors.
3. Establish and practise a fire escape plan with your family.
4. Have and know how to use a fire extinguisher.
5. Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
6. Don't overload electrical outlets.
7. Never leave cooking unattended.
8. During the holiday season, turn off all tree and display lights before going to bed or leaving the house.



detectors. Should there be a fire, a message will be instantly relayed to the alarm company, which will immediately notify the fire department.

"This will save valuable time, and possibly your life," says Stephen Millen, manager of

fire, don't overload electrical sockets and have the wiring of an old home checked to make sure that it meets current building codes.

In the kitchen, unplug heat producing appliances such as toasters, kettles, and electric frying pans when they're not in use and check

used for both grease and electrical fires. Learn how to operate it and keep it next to the stove.

Most important, be prepared. Practice a fire escape plan with your family and ensure that everyone knows that if the smoke and/or heat detector goes off or someone shouts "Fire" they should evacuate the premises immediately.

Escaping a fire can be especially dangerous for tenants of high-rise apartment buildings.

"If you hear the fire alarm, feel the door and make sure that it is not hot, which could indicate the fire is burning on the other side.

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