

Guidance for Abbeyfield Housekeepers: Fire safety in the kitchen

Introduction

Fires are one of the most serious potential hazards in our houses. In this guide we will look at preventing fires, and in the event of a fire, how to respond effectively.

Kitchen hazards

25% of all house fires start in the kitchen. The common causes of kitchen fires are:

- Unattended cooking (24% of all house fires)
- Tea towels over elements
- Flammable materials like curtains over the stove
- Carelessly discarded cigarettes
- Fireplace ashes that are still hot discarded in plastic or other unsuitable containers.

Making your kitchen safe

You can make sure your kitchen is safe from fires by:

- Always turn pot handles inwards when cooking to reduce the risk of them being knocked.
- Covering all pots with lids.
- Making sure that cords for electric kettles and toasters do not hang down and do not come into contact with sources of heat.
- Always putting the lid on the electric kettle.
- Unplugging the toaster before removing jammed toast (use toast tongs)
- Keeping the oven clean. A dirty oven can catch fire – if it does catch fire, leave the door closed and turn off the power.
- Taking extra care when cooking with fat or oil. When cooking with oil or fat you should
 - Always be there to watch the cooking
 - Not fill the pan more than half full
 - Remember food put into oil or fat will spit
 - Always keep a lid, the same size as the pan or bigger, next to the stove.

Making other areas of the House safe

You can ensure other areas of the House are safe from fires by:

- Always using a multi-box if you have more than one appliance connected to a power point, except heaters which should always be plugged directly into the wall.
- Always using a multi-box that has a circuit breaker. This is the red button that pops out to tell you that you have too many appliances running off the same power point. If the button pops, remove at least one appliance; don't just reset the button. The button warns you of a safety risk.

Fire safety equipment

Types of fires

There are different types of fire, so the types of fire extinguishers you have in your House will depend on the type of fires you can reasonably anticipate and the location within the House. So, for example, the type of extinguisher you have in the kitchen may be different to the one you may have in the garage.

If you do have a fire extinguisher in the kitchen, don't put it too close to the stove or cooking surfaces or any potential fire sources.

The six types of fires are:

1. Wood, paper, cardboard & plastics etc
2. Flammable & combustible liquids such as gasoline, kerosene and solvents
3. Flammable gases
4. Electrically energised equipment such as appliances, switches, panel boxes, power tools and hot plates.
5. Cooking oils and fats
6. Combustible metals such as magnesium, titanium, potassium and sodium. These materials burn at high temperatures and will react violently with water, air and/or other chemicals.

Please note that some fires may be a combination of these!

When to use a fire extinguisher

You are not required to fight a fire – EVER. If you have the slightest doubt about your control of the situation, DO NOT FIGHT THE FIRE.

There are different types of fire extinguishers. The most common ones for home usage are wet chemical extinguishers, as they are suitable for wood, paper & plastic fires as well as for cooking oils and fat fires. Ideally, fire extinguishers should be wall mounted and everyone should know where they are located and how to use them.

Fire extinguishers should only be used if **ALL** of the following conditions apply:

- It's safe to do so considering the size and location of the fire (your extinguisher will only last 10-15 seconds once started).
- You're confident you understand how to use the extinguisher correctly.
- Everyone has been evacuated and accounted for at your safe meeting place.
- Fire and Emergency New Zealand has been called.
- You can safely access and retreat from the fire.

Remember life is more important than property; don't put yourself or others at risk.

Operating a fire extinguisher

When operating a fire extinguisher, use the 'PTASS' technique:

- **P**ull the safety pin or remove the clip.
- **T**est squirt the extinguisher to make sure it is working.
- **A**im the nozzle at the base of the fire from a safe distance. Most extinguishers are designed to be operated from about 2 - 3 metres away.
- **S**queeze the handles.
- **S**weep the extinguisher from side to side while aiming at the base of the fire.

Fire blankets

Your kitchen should also be equipped with a fire blanket. These are useful for:

- Covering cooking oil and fat fires.
- Wrapping a person to smother a clothing fire.
- To escape through flames

Evacuation procedures

In the event of a fire you need to be able to get everyone out of the House quickly. Your house committee will have developed an evacuation plan and will run regular drills.

Ensure you know your part in these drills, and that you attend all Fire Service or other training provided by your committee.

Smoke alarms are wired in to every Abbeyfield House, and a regular Fire Safety check is carried out by an independent service.

What to do in case of a fire

If there's a fire in your house, you'll have around 3 minutes to get out before the fire becomes unsurvivable.

Here are the things you should do immediately:

- If there are others in the house, shout 'FIRE, FIRE, FIRE!'
- If there's smoke, get on your hands and knees and crawl low and fast to escape smoke. The smoke will be hot and poisonous, and if you breathe it in, it can kill you. Remember: Get Down, Get Low, Get out.
- If you can, close doors behind you to stop the fire spreading.
- If you can't get out of the house, close the door of the room you're in and put a towel under it to stop the smoke coming in. Go to the window and yell 'FIRE, FIRE, FIRE!'. Wait for help.
- If you can't open a window (if it has security stays, for example), consider using a chair or other furniture to break the glass. Use bedding to cover any remaining sharp pieces of glass to escape unharmed.

- As soon as it's safe, call 111 immediately either from a mobile phone or a neighbour's house.
- Meet at your agreed safe meeting place — somewhere safely away from the house.

Once you're out of the house, stay out. Never go back inside.

Remember to let the arriving firefighters know whether you are all safely out or if there's anyone missing.

Make sure you have an escape plan so you know the fastest way to get out of your house in an emergency.

Once you are at the safe meeting place:

- Check that all of the residents and workers are out of the house and at the meeting place. If someone is missing, find out where in the house they were last seen. **DO NOT GO BACK INTO THE HOUSE.** Firefighters have protective clothing and equipment to allow them to enter a burning building and try to rescue people and put the fire out.
- Call the Fire Service from a safe phone such as a neighbour's if this hasn't already been done.
- Get someone to go to the roadside and wave down the fire engine and tell the fire fighters about the fire and if anyone is still in the house, where they are likely to be.
- Take care of everyone and try to keep them calm.

What to do if your clothing catches fire

When a person's clothing catches fire, it is often very frightening and very painful. People need to know what to do if their clothing is on fire. You should:

- **STOP** cover your eyes;
- **DROP** to the ground; and
- **ROLL** over and over until the flames are out.

If you are within a few feet of a fire blanket, you can use this instead, but do not try to make it "just down the hall" if you are on fire.

If one of the residents or a co-worker's clothing catches fire and runs down the hallway in panic, tackle them and smother them with a fire blanket or get them to STOP, DROP and ROLL.

Do not try to beat the flames out with your hands or another object. You could get burnt and you will only fan the flames, so they burn faster.

Do not try to put the flames out by hugging the person because your clothing could burn too.