

Preventing Fires and Being Prepared

There are many ways a fire can start. Besides the obvious: matches, faulty wiring and flammable liquids, we must remember that improperly vented heaters, water heaters and refuse around the house are also potential threats. This is why it is very important that heaters are checked, serviced and cleaned before the winter season begins. Not only can a poorly maintained heater be a fire hazard, but it can also leak deadly carbon monoxide, which cannot be seen or smell, into your home.

Water heaters must be installed according to local codes and maintained in an unaltered condition. Remember that water heaters require gas or electricity, depending on the type, and if they are improperly connected they pose a potential, sometimes explosive, fire hazard. Some codes include strapping a water heater to a wall to prevent it from falling over during an earthquake or other disturbance. If a gas water heater falls the gas line can break causing gas to leak out. At this point any ignition source can cause a fire or explosion.

Electrical appliances such as microwave ovens, refrigerators and computers must also be regarded as a threat. Remember these appliances are powered by electricity, which can spark a fire in a matter of seconds. Appliances need room to "breathe", in order to release the heat that they produce. Even refrigerators get extremely warm. For this reason, appliances should not be placed in closed areas or in contact with walls.

Improper venting of a heater, water heater or fireplace can cause a fire. A fire of this type can be especially dangerous because the fire can start in an area that is not readily visible and the smoke can be sent right out of the house. This may cause a fire to grow undetected until it is too late. Ducts and vents need to be cleaned regularly and should be checked for cracks. Have your chimney cleaned annually in order to avoid a chimney fire. These fires can cause extensive damage and potentially spread into the attic or throughout the house.

In older homes aluminum wire was often used. Homes should be checked for this type of wiring. It can get very hot when used and tends to break when it gets old. Check around the area outside of your home for dry brush or trash and dispose of it properly. This will help prevent vegetation fires from burning your home.

Fire can occur just as easily outdoors as indoors. Every summer numerous houses are destroyed as a result of vegetation fires that burn out of control and whole forests are devastated. Sometimes these fires are started by natural causes, but usually they are started by careless people.

While outdoors some precautions that are used in the home apply to fire safety outside of your home. But there are still some special suggestions on how to be safe with fire while outdoors.

Cooking Outdoors

Be especially careful when the weather is very dry. To start charcoal fires, use an electric starter, cake fire starter, or charcoal starter and a match. Never use gasoline. To start a propane gas grill, always light the match before you turn on the gas, also avoid placing your bar-b-que under a patio cover or near a patio umbrella, a flare-up could ignite anything above the grill. When trying to rekindle or start a fire, never add flammable liquids. Tuck dry kindling under the coals, adding charcoal if necessary. Use and store grills outside the house and never under trees for sparks that could ignite the branches above.

Camping

When building a campfire, build it at a safe distance and downwind from where you pitched your tent or parked vehicle. Clear the area around your proposed fire sight of leaves and branches, dig a shallow pit and surround it with stones. When it is time o extinguish the fire cover it with water and dirt. Never leave a fire unattended and never leave your campsite if the fire is still lit or smoking. Obey all local fire regulations. Make sure your tend is made of fire retardant material, and never use candles or gas operated stoves or lanterns inside the tent, not only can they start a fire, but the flames can consume the oxygen inside the tent.

Matches

Matches are tools, not toys and should never be misused at any time. One match can destroy a forest.

Boating

Shut off your engine when refueling and use a funnel to prevent any spilling. Never use matches or smoke when near the fuel tank.

Forest Fires

Wildfires do happen, whether natural or caused by man, so take care. Be careful that you are not the cause of a forest fire. Be especially watchful during periods of drought when leaves and branches are very dry and burn more easily.

Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers act as a defense against small fires. They should never be used to FIGHT a fire or if a fire spreads to a larger one. The fire extinguisher must be displayed in plain view and be accessible to potential users. There should be multiple extinguishers in the house: in the garage, kitchen, laundry room, etc.

All users must know how to use the extinguisher and be strong enough to operate and control the unit. Each extinguisher must bear the seal and the approval of an independent testing lab. A fire extinguisher can only help if used properly and on the type of fire it was designed for. Just like smoke detectors, fire extinguisher must be maintained.

The owner's manual that comes with the unit will provide specific instructions on how to care for your extinguisher. One important maintenance habit is keeping the extinguisher charged. Fire extinguishers will generally lose their ability to discharge over time, whether used or not. If a fire extinguisher is used be sure to get it recharged. A partially charged extinguisher is nearly as useless as an empty one.

Remember, a fire extinguisher can only help you if: you have one insight, you know how and when to use it, and it is maintained and cared for.

When choosing a fire extinguisher it is important to pick a type suited for the type of fire most likely to happen in the area the extinguisher is to be stored. There are multipurpose extinguishers rated for more than one type of fire. An ABC extinguisher puts out most types of fires that could start in your home.

It is particularly dangerous to use type A or water extinguishers on a grease or electrical fire. Since water and grease don't mix using water only makes the grease spread along with the fire. If you use water on an electrical fire your risk of a severe electrical shock is very great. If you are unsure which type of extinguisher works for which type of fire, ask your dealer for information about it.

Smoke Detectors

In today's world of modern technology we have so many things that allow us to cook faster, travel easier, work better and stay safe. Smoke detectors are one of those devices.

Smoke detectors were produced out of necessity, since most people that die in fires were never alerted and died in their sleep, not from burning, but from inhaling the smoke and toxic fumes produced by a fire. Before smoke detectors, there was no other way of alerting families of impending fire danger in the home, until it was usually too late. Smoke detectors provide us with an early warning of a fire and are an important part of fire prevention.

Phone Numbers

Santa Clara County Gilroy City Community Development Department, Building and Life Safety Division 846-0430

Morgan Hill Building Division	779-7241
Morgan Hill Public Works Department, Inspections	776-7337
Morgan Hill City Housing Department	776-7373
Santa Clara County Sheriff (non-emergency)	686-3650
Gilroy Police Department (non-emergency)	846-0350
Morgan Hill Police Department (non-emergency)	779-2101

800 Toll Free Numbers

Airlines – Reservations and Information

Air Canada	1-800-776-3000
American Airlines (US, Canada)	1-800-433-7300
Canadian Airlines - US	1-800-426-7000
Canadian Airlines - Canada	1-800-426-1177
Continental Airlines (US, Canada)	1-800-231-0856
Delta Airlines	1-800-665-1177
Northwest Airlines (US, Canada)	1-800-225-2525
TWA (Trans World Airlines) (US, Canada)	1-800-221-2000
United Airlines (US, Canada)	1-800-241-6522
US Air (US Canada)	1-800-428-4322

Trains

Amtrak – US
Amtrak – Canada

Auto Rentals

Avis Rent-A-Car (US, Canada)	1-800-331-1212
Budget Rent-A-Car	1-800-527-0700

Dollar Rent-A-Car	1-800-800-4000
Hertz Rent-A-Car	1-800-654-3131
National Car Rental	1-800-328-4567
Thrifty Car Rental (US, Canada)	1-800-367-2277

Hotels and Motels – Reservations and Information

Best Western (US, Canada)	1-800-528-1234
Days Inn (US, Canada)	
Embassy Suites (US, Canada)	1-800-362-2779
Hilton Hotels (US, Canada)	1-800-445-8667
Holiday Inn (US, Canada)	1-800-465-4329
Howard Johnson Hotels & Lodges (US, Canada)	1-800-654-2000
Hyatt Hotels (US, Canada)	1-800-233-1234
ITT Sheraton Hotels (US, Canada)	1-800-325-3535
Marriott Hotels and Resorts	1-800-228-9290
Radisson Hotels	1-800-333-3333
Ramada Inn (US)	1-800-228-2828

Credit Cards – Information & Lost or Stolen Cards

American Express (US)	1-800-528-4800
Diners Club / Carte Blanche – US	1-800-234-6377
Diners Club / Carte Blanche – Canada	1-800-363-3333
Master Card (US, Canada)	1-800-826-2181
Visa – US	1-800-847-2911
Visa – Canada	1-800-336-8472

Traveler's Checks

American Express (US)	1-800-221-7282
Interpayment (US, Canada)	1-800-221-2426
MasterCard International (US, Canada)	1-800-223-7373

Couriers

DHL Worldwide Express – US	1-800-225-5345
DHL Worldwide Express – Canada	1-800-387-3887
Emery Worldwide (US, Canada)	1-800-443-6379
Federal Express (US)	1-800-238-5355
Puralator Courier (US, Canada)	1-800-387-3027
United Parcel Service (US, Canada)	1-800-742-5877
United States Post Office (US)	1-800-222-1811

Consumer Credit Counseling Attorney General's Office	1-800-952-5225
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American Red Cross – Gilroy	1-408-842-4414
Veterans Administration	1-800-827-0641
Department of Motor Vehicles	
Marriage Therapist	
Utilities	
Stress / Suicide Crisis	

