

Cigarettes: What You Need to Know

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Cigarette use makes an impact of 29% of the nation's fire deaths (one third being children), \$6 billion in societal costs and direct property damage, and 2,500 injuries.. Cigarettes are designed to continue burning when left unattended. Cigarettes vary in their potential to start fires, depending on cigarette design and content.

Facts on smoking material fires:

- In home fires, smoking materials mostly ignite trash, mattresses and bedding, and upholstered furniture.
- Smoking-related home fires peak in frequency in late afternoon and early evening. Fires peak during the hours when family members are coming home from their day's activities, but associated civilian fire deaths peak in the early morning, which suggests a long smoldering period for unnoticed, discarded cigarettes, which erupt into flames when one is awake to discover them.
- Smoking-related home fires and deaths peak during colder months, when people spend proportionally more time indoors and smokers may do much more of their smoking indoors.
- An unusually high percentage of smoking-material fire deaths involving drug or alcohol impairment, limitations because of age, physical or mental disabilities.
- A significant number of smoking fire deaths involve victims in the same room as the room of fire origin. Victims who are close to the fire or unable to respond effectively are difficult to save.

Principles of prevention that can make a difference:

- Use large, deep ashtrays that hold the cigarette in the center rather than on the side.
- Smoke only when fully alert, and in a standing or sitting position. Recognize that alcohol and some medications can cause drowsiness. Avoid smoking when under the influence of either.
- If children are in the home, make sure matches and lighters are not only out of sight, but locked up. Keep ahead of their natural curiosity; teach them matches and lighters are tools, not toys.
- Dispose ashes and butts in a metal can with a metal lid. Add water to the can. They can smolder for long periods.
- If you have smoking guests over, check the couches and chairs for any leftover smoldering materials.
- For those on oxygen, there should be no smoking where oxygen is being used by anyone, especially the one receiving therapy. Warn visitors to not smoke when you are using oxygen. Put up "No Smoking" signs in your home. In a restaurant, ask to be put in the no smoking area.

- Have a working smoke alarm in every bedroom, halls outside the bedrooms and on every level. Sleep with your bedroom door closed and consider residential sprinklers in your home.

Cigarette fires are predictable and preventable. Our habits make the difference.