

Home Fire Safety of Impaired Citizens

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Seniors experience a myriad of physical and cognitive changes that place them at a heightened risk of fire injury. Sensory impairments are a common complication of aging. The elderly tend to experience diminished visual acuity, depth perception, hearing, and sense of smell, as well as deficits in mobility and balance. Any one of these deficiencies can make an individual more vulnerable to the dangers of fires and burns.

Fire Safety Tips for all impairments:

Before the fire

- Identify the nearest fire exit and establish a meeting place.
- Install smoke alarms
- In an apartment, live near an exit.
- Plan and *practice* escape plans; share your plan with family, friends or neighbors.
- Seek help from the fire department to learn how to prevent fires- ***home safety survey**
- *During the fire*
- Get out and stay out
- Test doors before opening them
- Stay low and go
- Know how to stop, drop and roll

Fire Safety for Deaf or Hearing Impaired- Smoke alarms are known to save lives, but only if you can hear them.

- There are a variety of smoke alarms on the market that combine sound and strobe lights to alert those with limited hearing that there is a fire in the home.
- Consider installing a smoke alarm that uses a flashing light, vibration and/or sound to alert people to a fire emergency. The majority of fatal fires occur when people are sleeping, and because smoke can put people into a deeper sleep, it is important to have the necessary early warning of a fire to ensure that they wake.
- Keep a communications device nearby. If you use a TTY/TTD device, place it close to the bed so that communication with emergency personnel is possible should a fire or smoke trap you in your room.

Fire Safety for Visual Impairments- Sight is the primary sense of processing information contained in the environment. Loss of this sense may predispose an individual to ignite a fire accidentally or sustain an injury from an already lit fire. A blind or visually impaired person's, first indication of a fire usually will be the smell of smoke and accompanying sense of heat emanating from the fire. Unable to see exactly where the fire has originated, they are less likely to be able to extinguish even a small fire. Flames that otherwise would be easily extinguished can quickly become a serious threat. Also dangerous is the impact that the loss of sight has on the ability to escape a fire. Relying heavily on auditory clues, this individual must be able to react and respond to a sounding smoke alarm. If the individual has planned and practiced two escape routes from each room in the home, the chances of surviving a fire are improved.

Complications arise; if a person is in a foreign environment, such as a hotel, hospital, or new nursing facility. Inability to locate an escape route can waste the few precious minutes before smoke and toxic fumes will overcome an individual.

- Buy alarms that can be tested by using a flashlight or television remote.
- Count the number of rooms to the nearest exit if you are staying in an unfamiliar place.

Fire Safety for Mobility Impaired- Individuals with mobility impairments have unique needs and capabilities that potentially put them at a greater risk for fire injuries. These impairments may restrict the individual's ability to take swift action when faced with a small fire or to escape a larger fire. For these individuals, support from family, friends or neighbors becomes a big part of their safety. Fire prevention practices need to have a vital role in the home. There are also many available devices such as grab bars, non-slip rugs and special lighting that play a role increasing safety.

Not all residents that have hearing, visual or mobility impairments have the ability to prevent the serious risks they face with fire. It takes a caring community of neighbors, friends and family to make a difference in the lives of these individuals.

For more information on Home Safety Surveys or hearing impaired smoke alarms- call the Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department @763-786-4436 Ext. 104.