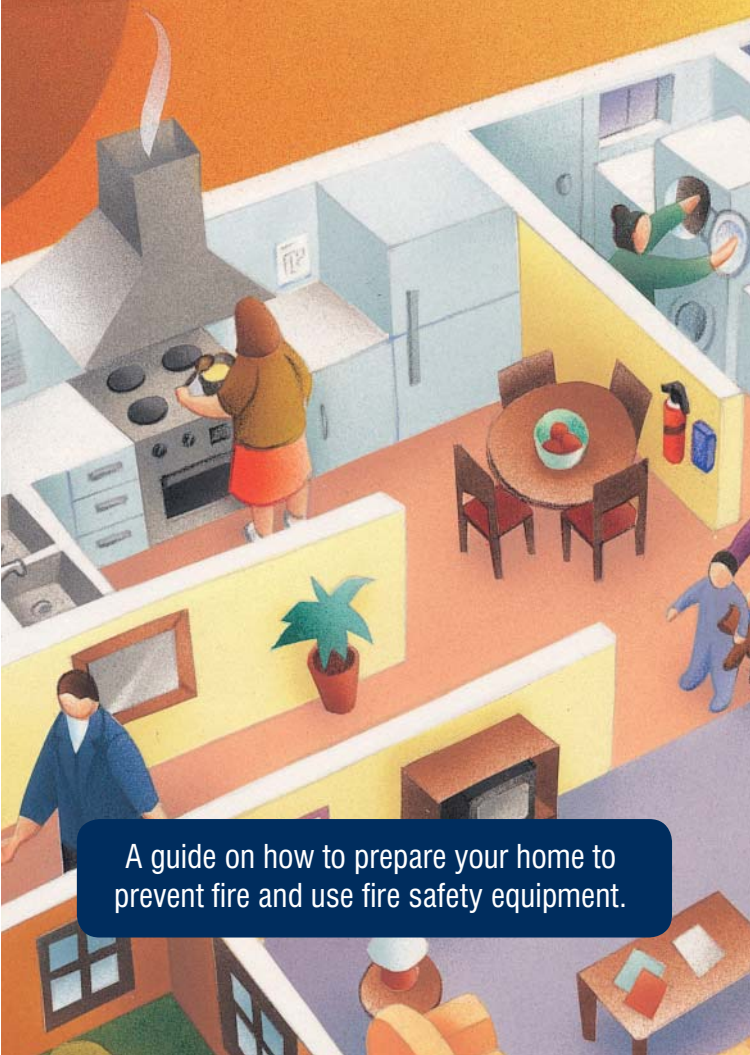


# FIRE SAFETY AT HOME

## ‘BE PREPARED’



A guide on how to prepare your home to prevent fire and use fire safety equipment.

# FIRE SAFETY AT HOME: 'BE PREPARED'

## Keep yourself, your family and your home safe from fire

Fires can cause serious injury or death. Fires can also destroy your most cherished possessions and home.

In Australia each year, some 70 people die as a result of fire, and probably more than 1000 people suffer from serious burns in house fires.

Children are most at risk of serious injury or death in house fires. Householders need to take extra care over winter, as fires occur more frequently during the colder months.

You can reduce the risk of fire occurring in your home by being aware of some protective fire safety measures. This booklet can help you to select fire safety equipment for your home, and prepare you to respond to fire in an emergency. Commonly used fire safety equipment includes:

- 🔥 smoke alarms
- 🔥 fire blankets
- 🔥 portable fire extinguishers

*be fire safety aware*  
**'be prepared'**



Photographs courtesy of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Melbourne.

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# HOW FIRES START AT HOME

## Top causes of house fires

- ▲ The kitchen is the most dangerous room in the house for fires. Cooking is the major cause of fires in the kitchen. These fires mainly occur in the evening between 5 and 7 pm.
- ▲ Faulty or damaged electrical wiring throughout the house and in home appliances can start dangerous fires.
- ▲ The incorrect use of portable heaters or appliances pose a fire threat, especially during winter in the morning and evening.
- ▲ Unsupervised children playing with matches and lighters can ignite fires that injure themselves and others.
- ▲ Discarded smoking materials can ignite fires at home.
- ▲ Fires can occur when candles and incense burners are left burning unattended.

*Fires can destroy your most cherished personal items, your home and cause serious injury or death*



# CONTENTS

Smoke alarms	3
Fire blankets	7
Portable fire extinguishers	8
Your home escape plan	12
Prepare your home to prevent fire	16



# SMOKE ALARMS

A smoke alarm senses smoke and can alert you to a fire to give you time to escape. The alarm can be wired into the household electrical mains (with a battery back-up), or be battery operated only. Wired-in alarms can be more reliable in the longer term.

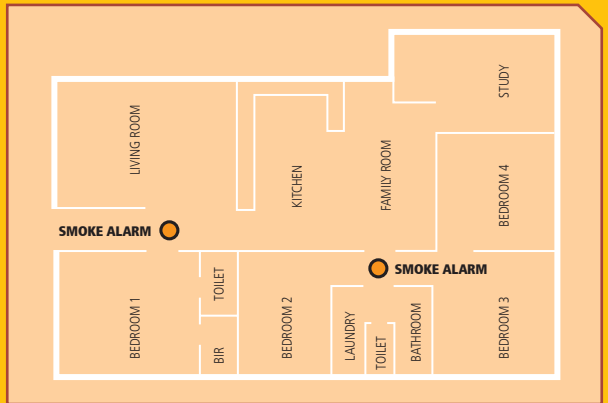
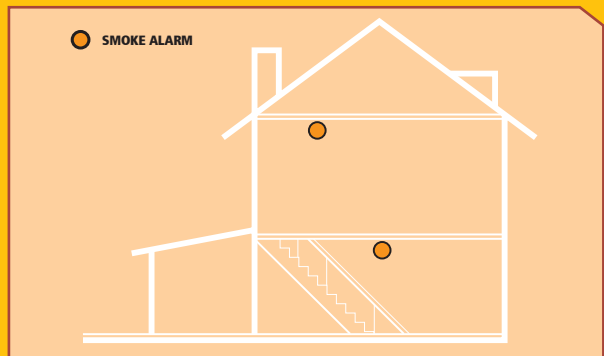
There are two main types of smoke alarms for your home, photoelectric and ionisation. While both types of alarms are effective for detecting flaming fires, the photoelectric smoke alarm is more effective for detecting smoke from smouldering fires. Many homes have an ionisation type of alarm installed, however fire authorities recommend that photoelectric type smoke alarms should be installed in bedrooms and adjacent hallways.

## Installing a smoke alarm

The location of the smoke alarm is important. The smoke alarm is best located near each bedroom, as you are most vulnerable to fire when you are sleeping. If you or family members sleep with the bedroom door closed, install a smoke alarm in the bedroom and connect it to other alarms in the house. Interconnecting smoke alarms are particularly important when there is more than one storey or where the bedrooms are located in different sections of your house.

Smoke alarm manufacturers recommend that you replace your smoke alarm every 10 years. If you live in a home with more than one storey, place a smoke alarm on each level and locate a smoke alarm at the bottom of the stairwell.

Avoid placing a smoke alarm near an airconditioning or heating unit. The air flow coming out of the unit may blow the smoke away from the smoke alarm and fail to alert you to a fire.

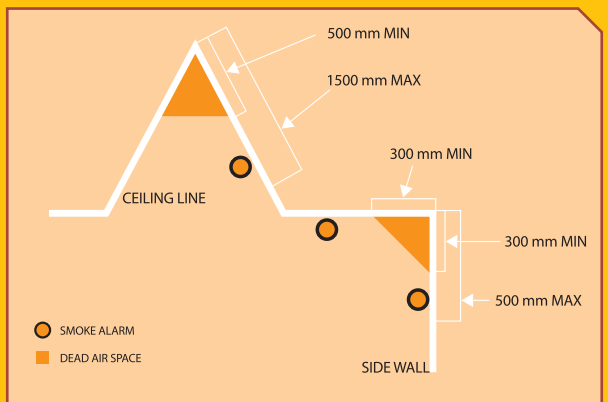


## Installing a smoke alarm on a wall

Smoke alarms should be installed on the ceiling. If it is not possible to fit the smoke alarm on the ceiling, it may be fitted on the wall. In this case, fit the smoke alarm between 150 mm (minimum) and 300 mm (maximum) below the ceiling line. Check the manufacturer's instructions to ensure it is suitable for wall mounting.

## Locating the smoke alarm away from a dead air space

When fitting a smoke alarm near a corner location on the wall, avoid placing it in a dead air space. The corner can create a dead air space that traps hot air and prevents smoke from reaching the smoke alarm. In this case, fit the smoke alarm between 300 mm (minimum) and 500 mm (maximum) below the ceiling line (see the diagram below). For a cathedral ceiling, place the smoke alarm between 500 mm (minimum) and 1500 mm (maximum) from the apex. Check the manufacturer's instructions to ensure it is suitable for wall mounting.



## IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A WORKING SMOKE ALARM



Test your smoke alarm weekly.



Clean your smoke alarm and the ceiling around it each month with a vacuum cleaner.



Change the battery at least once a year with the battery specified by the alarm manufacturer.

## FIRE BLANKETS

### Never use water to put out fat or oil fires

A fire blanket is very effective for smothering flames. You can use a fire blanket to cover a pan of burning cooking oil on a stove, or burning clothing on a child. Fire blanket containers display instructions for their use. Read these instructions carefully, so you are fully prepared before you need to use it.

If a fire blanket is used to smother a cooking oil fire, ensure that the blanket does not contact the burning oil, and make sure the stove is turned off. Call the fire brigade and do not attempt to remove the blanket or pot.

A fire blanket should only be used once. Throw the blanket away if it has already been used.

You should ensure that the fire blanket you buy meets appropriate Australian safety standards.

### Consider the best location to place the fire blanket

The fire blanket is best located where it can be easily reached in an emergency. Place the fire blanket near your normally used path to exit the kitchen, ideally near the kitchen door.













































# PORTABLE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Portable fire extinguishers can put out or contain fires that may start in your home. It is important to know which extinguisher to use for a particular fire and how to use an extinguisher correctly. Your local fire service can help you with specific training and advice. The information here is provided as a general guide on the range of portable fire extinguishers available, and how to use them in an emergency situation.

## Selecting a portable fire extinguisher

There are a number of types of portable fire extinguishers available. Each type of extinguisher may be rated for one or more classes of fire. Some extinguishers can be extremely dangerous to use on certain classes of fire and can increase the fire and threaten your safety. Some extinguishers are also considered ineffective against certain classes of fire. There are six classes of fire, A, B, C, D, E and F shown in the table below. Portable fire extinguishers are identified by their labels and colouring.

### Rechargeable fire extinguisher and fire blanket chart

Type of extinguisher		Type of fire, class and suitability						Comments		
		A	B	C	E	F	D**			
Colour scheme	Extinguishant	Wood, paper, plastics, etc	Flammable liquids	Flammable gases	Energised electrical equipment	Cooking oils and fats	Metal fires			
AS/NZS1841-1997	AS1841-1992									
		Water							Dangerous if used on flammable liquid, energised electrical equipment and cooking oil/fat fires	
		Wet chemical							Dangerous if used on energised electrical equipment	
		Foam***					 LIMITED*		Dangerous if used on energised electrical equipment.	
		Powder	ABE							Special powders are available specifically for various types of metal fires (see **).
			BE							
		Carbon dioxide								Generally not suitable for outdoor use. Suitable only for small fires.
			LIMITED*	LIMITED*						
		Vaporizing liquid								Check the characteristics of the specific extinguishant.
		Fire blanket	 Human torch							

\* Limited indicates that the extinguishant is not the agent of choice for the class of fire, but that it will have a limited extinguishing capability.

\*\* Class D fires (involving combustible metals). Use only special purpose extinguishers and seek expert advice.

\*\*\* Solvents which may mix with water, e.g. alcohol and acetone, are known as polar solvents and require special foam. These solvents break down conventional AFFF.

Portable fire extinguishers that meet the relevant Australian Standard come in three types: rechargeable, non-rechargeable and aerosols.

- ▲ Rechargeable portable fire extinguishers designed for household use come in various sizes with a range of extinguishant mediums. When selecting a rechargeable portable fire extinguisher assess your possible fire risk. Consult the manufacturer's recommendations for the most suitable extinguishant to use.
- ▲ Non-rechargeable portable fire extinguishers contain a powder extinguishant.
- ▲ Portable aerosol fire extinguishers are non-rechargeable and cover a range of fire classes. Check the manufacturer's recommendations for specific use.

Have your portable fire extinguisher replaced, or serviced and refilled after use. Check that the portable fire extinguisher you buy complies with the relevant Australian safety standard and read the label carefully before you need to use the extinguisher in an emergency. Always have rechargeable portable fire extinguishers serviced and maintained by a qualified service agent in accordance with Australian Safety Standard 1851. Dispose of aerosol extinguishers before the 'use-by' date.

## Know when and how to use a portable fire extinguisher

Portable fire extinguishers are for small fires only. Most importantly, don't place yourself in danger when you use a portable fire extinguisher. Be sure that the fire is small enough

to be managed by a portable extinguisher, and is not spreading beyond the immediate area. Before you use an extinguisher to fight a fire, make sure that you have a clear view of the fire and that you can approach the fire safely. Do not attempt to fight the fire if it is too hot or fierce. Fires can block your escape path when out of control, so be sure that your back is to an exit and you have a clear path of escape. If it is not safe, escape from the fire and call the fire service.

### Cooking oil and fat fires

Never use water to extinguish a cooking oil or fat fire. A powder BE-rated portable fire extinguisher is recommended to put out cooking oil and fat fires in the kitchen. It is best to place the extinguisher near to the normally used path you take to leave the kitchen, such as near the kitchen door.

When using a powder extinguisher on burning cooking oil or fat, it is recommended that you stand about two metres from the fire and aim over the pan. Do not aim the extinguishant directly into the pan that contains burning cooking oil or fat, as you may spread the fire around the kitchen.

### Flammable liquids and gas fires

For the garage, a powder ABE-rated portable fire extinguisher is recommended to extinguish flammable liquids and gases.



# YOUR HOME ESCAPE PLAN

## Create a fire escape plan for your home. Know how you will escape.

Draw a floor plan of your home and identify two ways out from each room. If you live in a two-storey home, find a way to escape from the upper level. Check that the windows and flyscreens open freely and that children can easily open each exit. Give special consideration to the needs of elderly people and people with a disability.

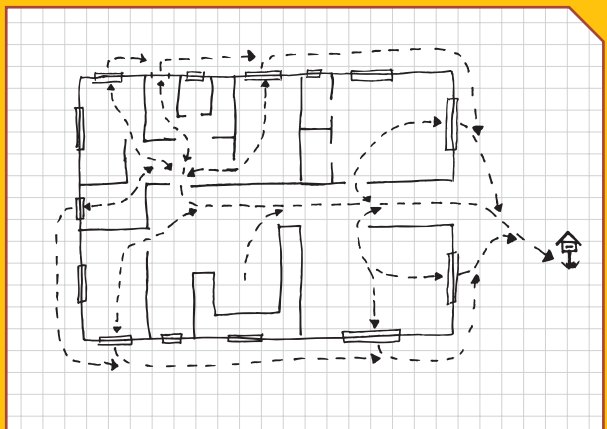
Display the escape plan in a central area of your home—such as the fridge or a notice board. Practise your escape plan at least twice a year.

You must be able to escape from your home in the event of fire. When at home, keep a key in the inside deadlock to ensure that you can leave quickly.

*You may only have two minutes or less to leave*



## HOME ESCAPE PLAN



## TRAIN YOUR FAMILY IN AN EVACUATION PROCEDURE

- ▶ follow the escape plan
- ▶ alert others as you go
- ▶ when there is smoke, crawl low to get under the smoke
- ▶ test each door using the back of your hand, if the handle is hot do not open it
- ▶ close the door as you leave a room to prevent fire and smoke from spreading
- ▶ never go back inside the house, once out stay out
- ▶ meet at the assembly area—such as the letterbox
- ▶ make sure all the family know how to call the fire service
- ▶ meet the fire service



# IF CLOTHING CATCHES FIRE

If your clothes catch on fire, don't try to run away—this will only make the fire burn hotter and faster. Instead remember to: STOP, DROP and ROLL.

**STOP** don't run as running will make the flames bigger.

**DROP** to the ground and cover your face with your hands.

**ROLL** over to smother the flames.

Teach your children this technique so they know what to do if ever their clothing catches alight.

To help someone else whose clothes are on fire, throw a woollen blanket over them to smother the flames.

After the flames are extinguished, cool the burnt area with clean, cold water. Do not attempt to remove melted clothing or other materials from the skin. Don't use ice, cotton wool or anything such as butter or ointments on the burn. Seek medical help from a doctor or hospital.

You can further protect your children by selecting 'low fire danger' clothing for them; particularly for pyjamas, night gowns and infant sleeping bags.

*Children especially need to know and practise fire safety techniques*



## LEARN TO 'STOP, DROP AND ROLL'



Stop. Don't run as this will fan the flames.



Drop to the ground and cover your face with your hands.



Roll over to smother the flames.

# PREPARE YOUR HOME TO PREVENT FIRE

## GENERAL

- Install an electrical safety switch.
- Don't overload power points.
- Switch off appliances when not in use.
- Check electrical equipment for frayed cords.
- Keep lighters and matches away from children.
- Ensure central heating and airconditioning units are checked by a qualified tradesperson annually.
- Install smoke alarms and check them regularly.
- Check that windows and security grilles open for an easy exit.
- Keep all exit paths clear.

## 1 ENTRANCE

- Keep keys in internal door locks.

## 2 LIVING ROOM

- Place a screen in front of open fires.
- Clean your chimney or flue once a year.
- Keep portable heaters away from curtains, tablecloths and bedding.
- Ensure electrical equipment has sufficient air circulation to avoid build up of heat (televisions, video, stereo and computer equipment).
- Never leave a naked flame unattended.

## 3 KITCHEN

- Write an escape plan and place it in a central location.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Place a fire extinguisher in the kitchen near the exit.
- Keep a fire blanket in the kitchen near the exit.
- Wear clothing with fitted sleeves when cooking.
- Never use sprays or liquid cleaners near hot surfaces as they can be highly flammable.

5

3

4

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## 5 LAUNDRY

- Clean the lint filter of the clothes dryer every time it is used.
- Take care with stored chemicals and fuels.
- Ensure there is a battery powered torch ready to use in the house.

7

## 4 BEDROOMS

- Check electric blankets before placing them on the bed.

## 6 OUTSIDE

- In bushfire prone areas keep the ground around your home clear of materials that may burn.
- Clean your gutters regularly.

## 7 GARAGE

- Store flammable liquids safely.

Home fire safety is important for the whole family



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This booklet was produced by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in collaboration with the Fire Protection Association Australia.

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