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Tennessee State Fire Marshal's Office urges older adults to take fire safety measures

NASHVILLE, TN – Knowing what to do in the event of a fire is particularly important for older adults. At age 65, people are twice as likely to be killed or injured by fires compared to the population at large. Presently, adults aged 65 and older make up 12 percent of the total U.S. population and that number grows every year. The Tennessee State Fire Marshal's Office urges older adults across the state to take the necessary steps to stay safe and encourage and educate their families to do so as well.

“Statistics have consistently shown that older adults are extremely vulnerable when it comes to fire-related deaths and injuries,” said State Fire Marshal Julie Mix McPeak. “We urge older adults, as well as their families and those who care for them, to increase fire safety measures in and around the home.”

Of the 83 residential fire deaths reported in Tennessee last year, 34 percent (28 fatalities) were adults aged 65-years-old or older.

The State Fire Marshal's Office offers the following fire safety guidelines for older adults:

- **Keep it low:** Consider sleeping in a room on the ground floor in order to make emergency escape easier. When looking for an apartment or high-rise home, look for one with an automatic sprinkler system. Sprinklers can extinguish a home fire in less time than it takes for the fire department to arrive.
- **Sound the alarm:** The majority of fatal fires occur when people are sleeping. Smoke can put you into a deeper sleep rather than waking you, therefore it's important to have an early warning of a fire. You should have smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement. Install smoke alarms in hallways leading to bedrooms and inside every bedroom in your home. Test your smoke alarms regularly and replace the batteries once a year or consider alarms with long-life batteries. Smoke alarms that are 10 years old or older need to be replaced. If anyone in your household is deaf or if your own hearing is diminished, consider installing a smoke alarm that uses a flashing light or vibration to alert you to a fire emergency.
- **Do the drill:** Have a home fire escape plan with two ways out of every room and a designated safe meeting place outside. Practice your plan regularly. If you or someone you live with cannot escape alone, designate a member of the household to assist. Fire drills are also a good opportunity to make sure that everyone is able to hear and respond to smoke alarms.
- **Open up:** Make sure that you are able to open all doors and windows in your home. Locks and pins should open easily from inside. If you have security bars on doors or windows, they should have emergency release devices inside so that they can be opened easily. Check to be sure that windows haven't been sealed shut with paint or nails.
- **Stay connected:** Keep a telephone near your bed, along with emergency phone numbers, so that you can communicate with emergency personnel if you're trapped in your room by fire or smoke.
- **Cook with care:** Wear short, close-fitting or tightly rolled sleeves when cooking. Don't leave cooking unattended on the stove. Use a timer to remind you of food in the oven. Check to see that the oven and stovetop are off before going to bed each night. Never use the oven to heat your home.

- **Give space heaters space:** Keep space heaters three feet from anything that can burn, including furniture, blankets, pets, and yourself. Turn space heaters off when you leave the room and when you go to bed at night.
- **Eliminate careless smoking:** The leading cause of residential fire deaths among older adults is careless smoking. Never smoke in bed or when drowsy. Refrain from smoking near an oxygen source, gas stove, or other flammable objects. Use deep, sturdy ashtrays and extinguish cigarette butts completely with water or sand before disposal.

For more information on making your home fire-safe, download and print the State Fire Marshal's home fire safety checklist (<http://tn.gov/fire/fsk/documents/checklist.pdf>).

The [State Fire Marshal's Office](#) is a division of the [Department of Commerce and Insurance](#), which works to protect consumers while ensuring fair competition for industries and professionals who do business in Tennessee.

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