



NFPA Urges Added Caution around Home Fire Safety during COVID-19 Pandemic



As the public largely remains at home in response to COVID-19, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is urging everyone to use added caution around home fire safety.

Cooking, heating, and electrical equipment are among the leading causes of home fires each year. As people continue to stay at home and engage in these activities, it's critical that they recognize where potential hazards exist and what can be done to prevent them.

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and is responsible for nearly half (49 percent) of all reported home fires involving cooking equipment. Moreover, *unattended* cooking is the leading cause of home cooking fires, meaning that home cooking fires occur most often when people aren't keeping a close eye on what they're cooking.

As many households are now dealing with unusual routines and out-of-the-ordinary circumstances, such as kids' home from school and parents working from home, there's greater potential for distracted cooking.

NFPA statistics show that heating equipment is the second-leading cause of home fires, resulting in an average of 52,050 home fires each year. Electrical distribution or lighting equipment is involved in an annual average of 35,100 home fires.

For much of the country, heating systems are still in use and in many cases, for more hours than usual. In addition, with everyone at home, people may be using the same outlets to charge phones, laptops and other digital equipment, which also presents a fire hazard.

With these concerns in mind, NFPA reminds the public to use best practices for staying fire-safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond:

Cooking

- Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, boiling, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.

- If you are simmering, baking, or roasting food, check it regularly, remain in the home while food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you that you are cooking.
- Keep anything that can catch fire — oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels or curtains — away from your stovetop.
- Make sure all handles are turned inward, away from where someone can grab a hot handle or tip a pan over.
- Be on alert. If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, refrain from using the stove or stovetop.
- If you have young children in your home, create a “kid-free zone” of at least 3 feet (1 meter) around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is prepared or carried.

Heating

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet (one meter) away from heating equipment, like the furnace, fireplace, wood stove, or portable space heater.
- Have a three-foot (one meter) “kid-free zone” around open fires and space heaters.
- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Always use the right kind of fuel, specified by the manufacturer, for fuel burning space heaters.
- Install and maintain carbon monoxide (CO) alarms to avoid the risk of CO poisoning. If you smell gas in your gas heater, do not light the appliance. Leave the home immediately and call your local fire department or gas company.

Electrical

- When charging smartphones and other digital devices, only use the charging cord that came with the device.
- Do not charge a device under your pillow, on your bed or on a couch.
- Only use one heat-producing appliance (such as a coffee maker, toaster, space heater, etc.) plugged into a receptacle outlet at a time.
- Major appliances (refrigerators, dryers, washers, stoves, air conditioners, microwave ovens, etc.) should be plugged directly into a wall receptacle outlet. Extension cords and plug strips should not be used.
- Check electrical cords to make sure they are not running across doorways or under carpets. Extension cords are intended for temporary use.
- Use a light bulb with the right number of watts. There should be a sticker that indicates the right number of watts.

In addition, smoke alarms should be located on every level of the home, in each bedroom, and near all sleeping areas. Test them monthly to make sure they’re working. NFPA also strongly encourages households develop and practice a home escape plan to ensure that everyone knows what to do in a fire and can escape quickly and safely.