

Tips to prevent a house fire

By Teri Mizuhara

Across the nation more than 236,000 house fires occur annually and they peak in January due to the winter weather.

Many of these fires are preventable.

Here are some key things you can do to reduce your chance of becoming a statistic:

- The No. 1 cause of house fires (33 percent) are cooking fires, so to prevent this type of fire simply never leave food unattended. If you must leave your kitchen, either turn off the appliance that is cooking the food or take a timer or cooking implement with you to remind you of the cooking food. How you heat your home can put you at risk of a house fire.
- Fireplaces, chimneys and fireplace related heating equipment should be professionally maintained annually. Among other things, a professional should check that your stove pipes/chimneys and surrounding area are not deteriorating and becoming compromised to the point they can cause a fire.
- Do not overload your electrical outlets. Consider having a licensed electrician check and possibly upgrade your home's wiring since many house fires are traced back to electrical malfunctions, such as short circuits or arcing. According to a U.S. Fire Administration Topical Fire Report, older homes (35 years-plus) are at an increased risk of catching fire and "there are three major areas in older properties that contribute to compromised electrical systems: the effects of aging on the wiring itself, misuse and abuse of the electrical components, and non-code-compliant installations."
- Make sure you have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide

detectors properly installed and maintained in your home. Literally every second counts in a house fire, so make sure you have your “early warning” system in place and functioning in the event you have a fire. Always exit the building immediately and call 911 from outside the building. Never go back inside the house.

With the holidays behind us and 2014 ahead of us, this is a good time to focus on our personal safety. Preventing a fire might be hard to measure, but the results are priceless.

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