



your home fire safety



CFA attends more than 1000 house fires every year.

Most fatal fires occur in the home, but the real tragedy is that many of these could be avoided.

A moment's distraction in the kitchen, a faulty electrical appliance or washing left too close to a heater could all have disastrous consequences, causing major structural damage or exposing family members to harm.

Fortunately there are a few simple things you can do to help protect your family from the dangers of fire. Taking the time to “check your hotspots”, making sure you have a working smoke alarm, and preparing a home escape plan can give you a greater chance of avoiding the devastating effects of fire.



Disclaimer

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common causes of house fires



Stoves can be a major fire hazard



Check switches are in good working order

Most house fires start in the kitchen

- Kitchen stoves are a major fire hazard.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Keep stoves and grills free from grease and fat build up.
- Keep the stove and toaster away from tea towels and curtains.
- Wear tight-fitting sleeves when cooking.

Faulty wiring is dangerous

- Ensure all switches are in good working order. Wires should not be exposed and should always be insulated.
- Have all repairs done by a registered electrician. Don't attempt to do it yourself.
- Never overload power outlets. Multiple double adaptors and powerboards can overload power points.
- Don't place extension leads under carpet or furniture.
- Install safety switches. These isolate power instantly from your switchboard if a sudden surge of power is detected. Go to the Energy Safe Victoria website www.esv.vic.gov.au for more information.

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common causes of house fires

Electrical appliances

- Ensure appliances are used in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.
- Check electrical items are in good working order. Have them maintained and checked by a registered electrician if you are concerned, especially second-hand items.
- Have damaged plugs and leads replaced by a registered electrician.
- Turn off appliances at the power point when not in use.
- If a fire starts, turn off power immediately at power point or switchboard if safe to do so.

Electric blankets

- Never leave electric blankets on overnight or during the day – turn them on about 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Store electric blankets according to manufacturer's instruction.
- Do not place heavy objects on a working electric blanket. This includes pets.
- Don't sleep with electric blankets on.

Smoking in bed

- Never smoke in bed.
- Embers can smoulder in bedding and burst into flame when you are asleep.
- Ensure butts are extinguished before disposal.

Clothes dryers

- Clean lint filter after each use.
- Allow dryer to complete cool-down cycle.

Home heating

- Turn off heating when you go to bed.
- Do not place clothing too close to heaters.
- Ensure heaters and flues are professionally installed and maintained.
- Check walls and floors are appropriately insulated from heat sources and that heaters are well distanced from combustible materials.
- Be careful where you place portable heaters.
- Place a screen in front of open fires.
- Never let a fire burn after you've gone to bed or left the house. Ensure ashes are cold before discarding.
- Never leave children unattended near open fires or heaters.

Candles and oil burners

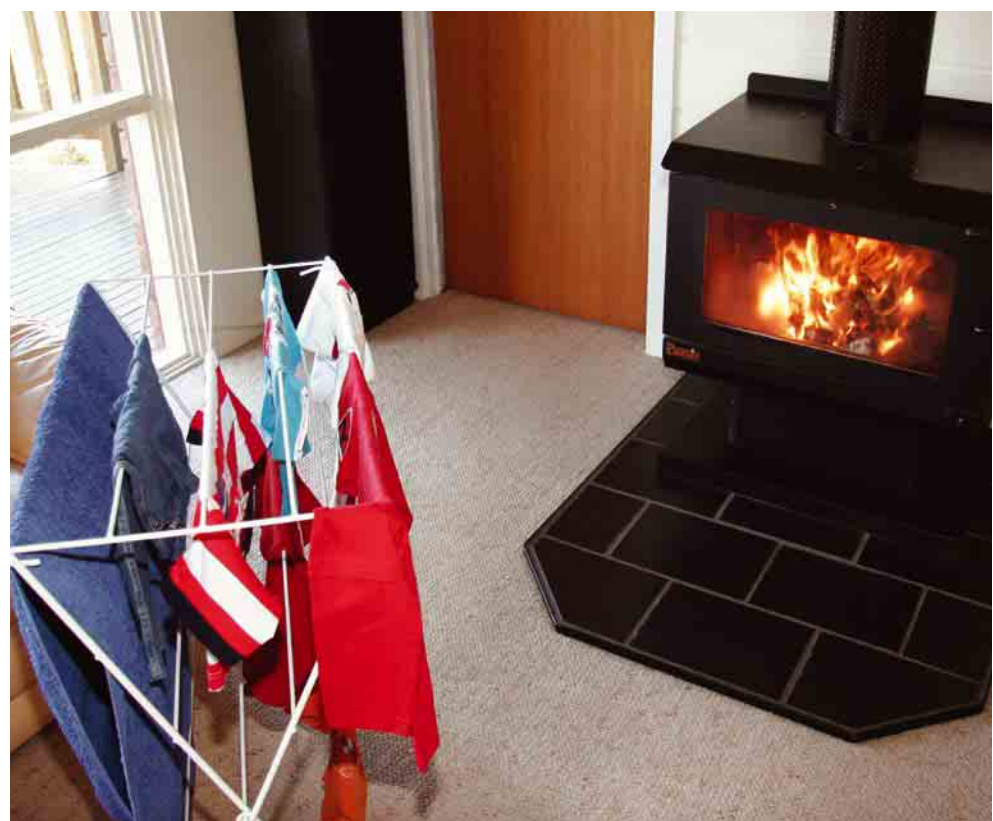
- Keep candles away from curtains and other flammable materials.
- Always use on non-combustible surfaces.
- Make sure you use water and oil in the heating bowl.



Place a screen in front of open fires



Clean the clothes dryer filter



Don't hang clothes too close to fires or heaters

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teach children to be careful around fire



Keep matches out of reach of children



Teach children to give matches to an adult

- One in four childhood accidents involves burns.
- Keep all matches, lighters and candles out of reach of small children.
- Use child-safe lighters.
- Teach young children to give all matches and lighters to an adult.
- Ensure older children know that matches are to be used only in the presence of adults.
- Teach children to call 000 if there is an emergency.
- Educate your children so they know how to get out of the house in the event of a fire.
- Conduct regular fire drills with children so they know where to meet once outside the house.
- Instruct children to get down low and go, go, go if there is smoke in the house.*
- Teach children to stop, drop and roll if their clothes catch fire.*



*See Fire Survival Rules – Page 10



Practise escape routes in case of fire

Many families owe their lives to working smoke alarms

You can't smell smoke when asleep, so smoke alarms are an essential early-warning system to alert you and your family to the dangers of fire and smoke.

Building regulations state that every home in Victoria must have a smoke alarm complying with Australian Standard AS 3786. Existing homes may install battery-powered smoke alarms, but all new houses must be fitted with hardwired-in smoke alarms prior to occupancy. Hardwired alarms still require a battery for back-up power supply.

Despite the regulations, research suggests only 45 per cent of properties attended by fire services had smoke alarms and, of those, 31 per cent were not working.

You can ensure your smoke alarm is constantly protecting your family by keeping it in good working order.

- Test it weekly by pushing the test button with a broom handle to make sure it beeps.
- Dust the alarm with a vacuum cleaner brush.
- Change the battery at least once a year. It's easy to remember if you do it when you adjust your clock for daylight saving.

A smoke alarm that's not working is useless and provides a false sense of security.

Make the right choice

Smoke alarms are inexpensive and easy to install. When choosing an alarm for your home, be sure to select one that meets Australian Standard AS 3786.

There are two types of smoke alarms – ionisation alarms that predominantly detect the presence of extremely small particles of smoke, and the newer photo-electric alarms that detect visible smoke.

Research indicates that although both types of alarms give occupants time to escape, photo-electric alarms are consistently more effective at detecting smouldering fires in homes.

- CFA urges all householders to supplement their existing ionisation smoke alarms with photo-electric alarms.

Correct installation is vital

For minimum protection, install a smoke alarm outside each bedroom or sleeping area in your home. If you live in a house with more than one level, install a smoke alarm on each level.

It is preferable to have smoke alarms interconnected. Some types of smoke alarms can be interconnected to each other, so that if one alarm sounds the other alarms also activate.



Test smoke alarm weekly



Dust smoke alarm with vacuum cleaner

Houses with a children's wing should have interconnected alarms linking to an alarm near an adult's bedroom. Studies have shown 85 per cent of sleeping children do not wake to the sound of a smoke alarm.

It is the responsibility of the landlord to ensure smoke alarms are installed in rental properties.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions when installing smoke alarms.

- On a ceiling: The smoke alarm should be located in the centre of the ceiling. If it cannot be located here it should be located 300mm from any cornice or wall.
- On a wall: The smoke alarm should be located 300mm-500mm from the ceiling.
- On a cathedral ceiling or sloping ceiling: The smoke alarm should be located 500mm-1500mm from the highest point.
- Avoid drafts: Do not install smoke alarms near windows, doors or air ducts where drafts could affect alarm sensitivity.

Diagram 1:
Smoke alarms in hallways

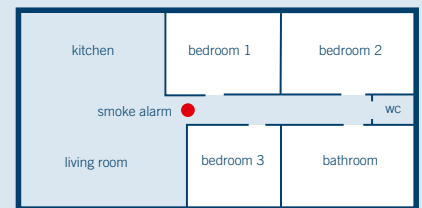


Diagram 2:
Residential building with separate sleeping areas

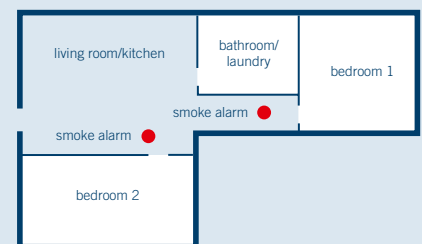
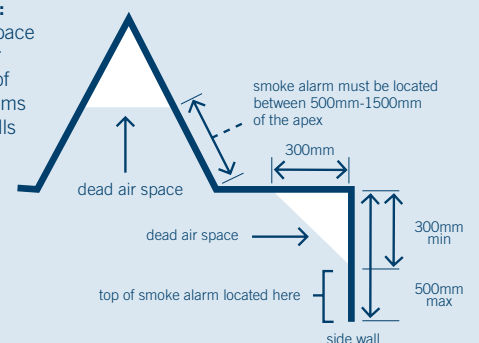


Diagram 3:
Dead air space and proper mounting of smoke alarms on side walls



The distance from the apex of the cathedral ceiling to the top of the alarm must be between 500mm and 1500mm

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working smoke alarms save lives

- Avoid dead air spaces: A dead air space is an area in which trapped hot air will prevent smoke from reaching the alarm. This generally occurs at the apex of cathedral or sloping ceilings, the corner junction of walls and ceilings, and between exposed floor joists.

For further information on correct smoke alarm installation, go to:

www.buildingcommission.com.au

Smoke alarms for the hearing impaired

Special smoke alarms are available for the hearing impaired. These may feature a flashing strobe light and/or a vibrating pad that can be placed under the pillow to activate when the alarm sounds.

Some alarms are designed to interconnect with conventional audible alarms in different locations within the home. If one of the alarms senses smoke, all will sound, the strobe will flash and the vibrating pad will operate.

Other alarms are portable units that can be taken from one residence to another.

There are no Australian Standards for smoke alarms for the blind, deaf and hearing impaired, but there is a Standard for the smoke-alarm-sensing component only. CFA recommends people purchase alarms that quote this Standard, AS 3786.

Further information for the hearing impaired can be found at:

Victorian Deaf Society
www.vicdeaf.com.au

Disability Information Online
www.disability.vic.gov.au

Smoke alarm replacement and disposal

Smoke alarms don't last forever and usually have a lifespan of about 10 years. If your alarm is older than this, CFA recommends it be replaced.

Some smoke alarms have a use-by date printed on them, but if your alarm is still "beeping" after you have changed its battery, it should be replaced.

From September 2007, legislation allows smoke alarms to be thrown out with household rubbish.

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extinguish the threat

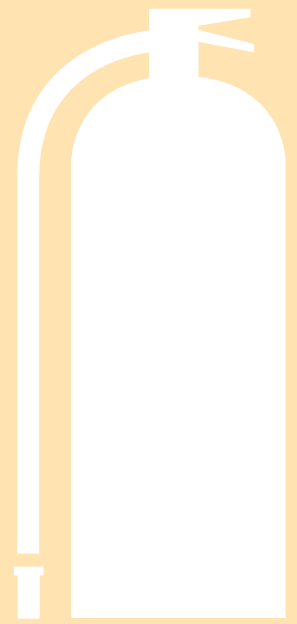


Keep a fire blanket and extinguisher in the kitchen

Small house fires can quickly get out of control, so every home should have basic firefighting equipment within easy reach.

- Ensure your house has a properly maintained fire extinguisher and fire blanket, and know how to use them. Look for products that meet the Australian Standard AS 2444.
- It's a good idea to keep these in the kitchen as this is where most house fires start.
- If the fire is small and localised and it is safe to do so, extinguish it using the fire blanket or fire extinguisher.
- These are available from hardware shops and many supermarkets, or can be ordered from CFA's Fire Equipment Maintenance Department.

Go to www.cfa.vic.gov.au/residents/home/equip.htm for more information.



FIRE

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surviving a house fire

Do you know what to do if fire breaks out in your home?

All families should prepare a home escape plan and practise it.

This identifies all the exits in your house and the designated location where family members will meet once they are safely outside.

- There's a worksheet at the back of this booklet to help you.

All those who care for your children or stay in your house should be aware of the fire escape plan. Show them all the exits and where the telephone and emergency numbers are located.

Keep emergency numbers near the phone

- Ensure emergency numbers are beside all the telephones in your home.
- Dial 000 for fire, police and ambulance.
- It's never too early to teach children how to contact emergency services.

Conduct fire drills regularly with the whole household and identify the quickest, safest way to get out of the house from every room, including upper floors.

Agree on a place to meet outside and stick to it. The letterbox may be a suitable location. Ensure your house number is clearly visible so emergency services can find you quickly.

Fire survival rules

If your clothes catch fire, stop, drop and roll to smother the flames.

- To help someone else, throw a woollen blanket over them.

If there's smoke in your house, get down low and go, go, go!

- In a fire, the safest area for breathing is near the floor where the air is cooler and cleaner, so remember to crawl low in smoke.

Check doors for heat before opening.

- Use the back of your hand to check for heat, then get down low and crawl to safety. Close doors behind you if possible. If the door is hot, use another exit.

Get everyone out of the house as quickly as possible.

Call the fire brigade from a neighbour's house, public or mobile phone and wait for them to arrive.

- Tell them where the fire is and if anyone is still inside.

Don't go back inside for any reason.



Prepare a home escape plan



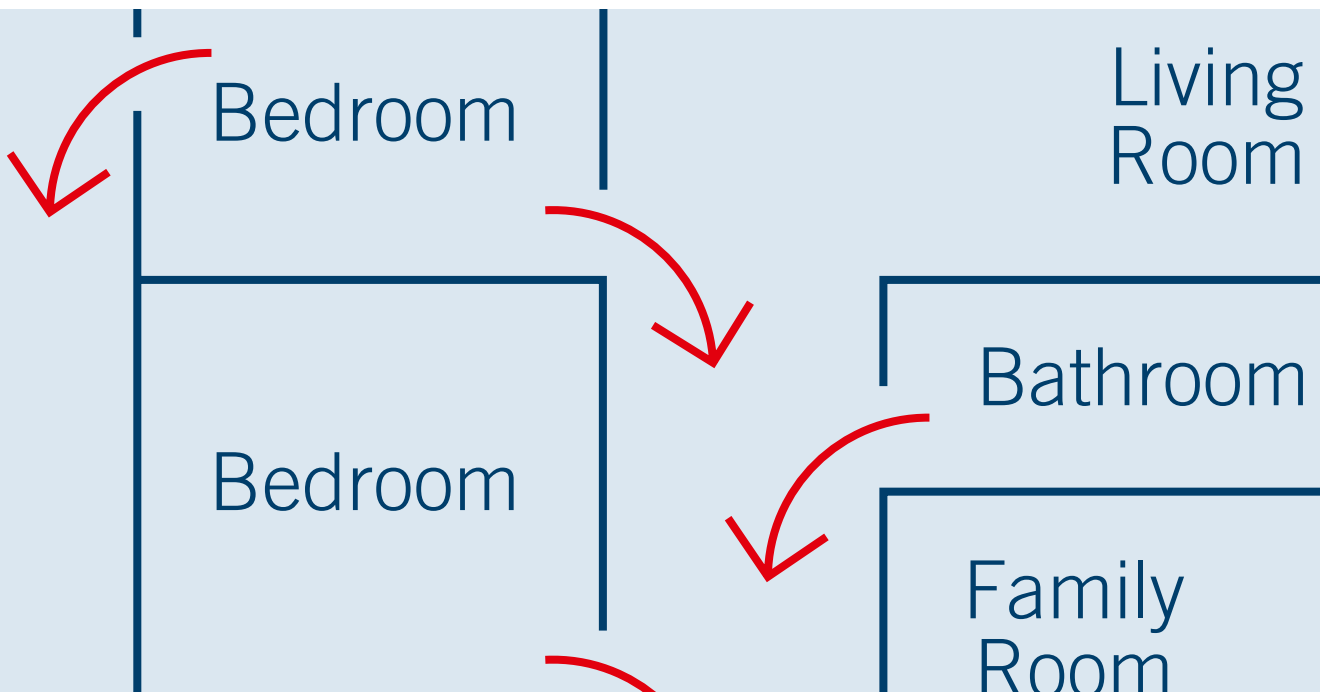
Check doors for heat



Agree on a place to meet outside

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your home fire escape plan



The majority of fatal fires occur in the home, yet research shows many Victorians do not have a plan detailing what they will do if fire breaks out.

Every household should have a home fire escape plan and practise it regularly.

A home fire can expose you to temperatures in excess of 600°C. However, most people die from inhaling smoke and toxic gasses long before the flames reach them.

Families who are well-prepared are more likely to escape their homes safely and without panic.

Use the grid attached to create a home fire escape plan, and display it prominently. The refrigerator door is a good place.

Gather the family and draw your home floor plan on the grid, marking all the exits.

Get the children involved. Ask them to help you identify the two quickest and safest ways to get out of the house from every room, including upper floors.

Agree on a place to meet outside and stick to it. The letterbox may be a suitable location.

Once you've prepared your plan, hold regular fire drills and see how quickly family members can get out of the house. It's a good idea to practise at least twice a year – more often if you have young children.



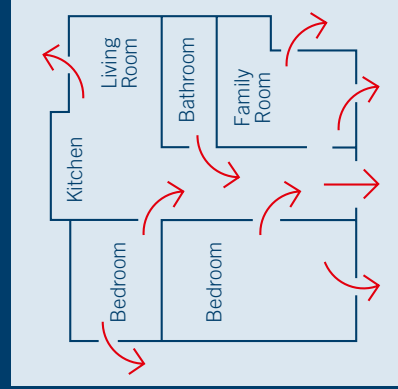
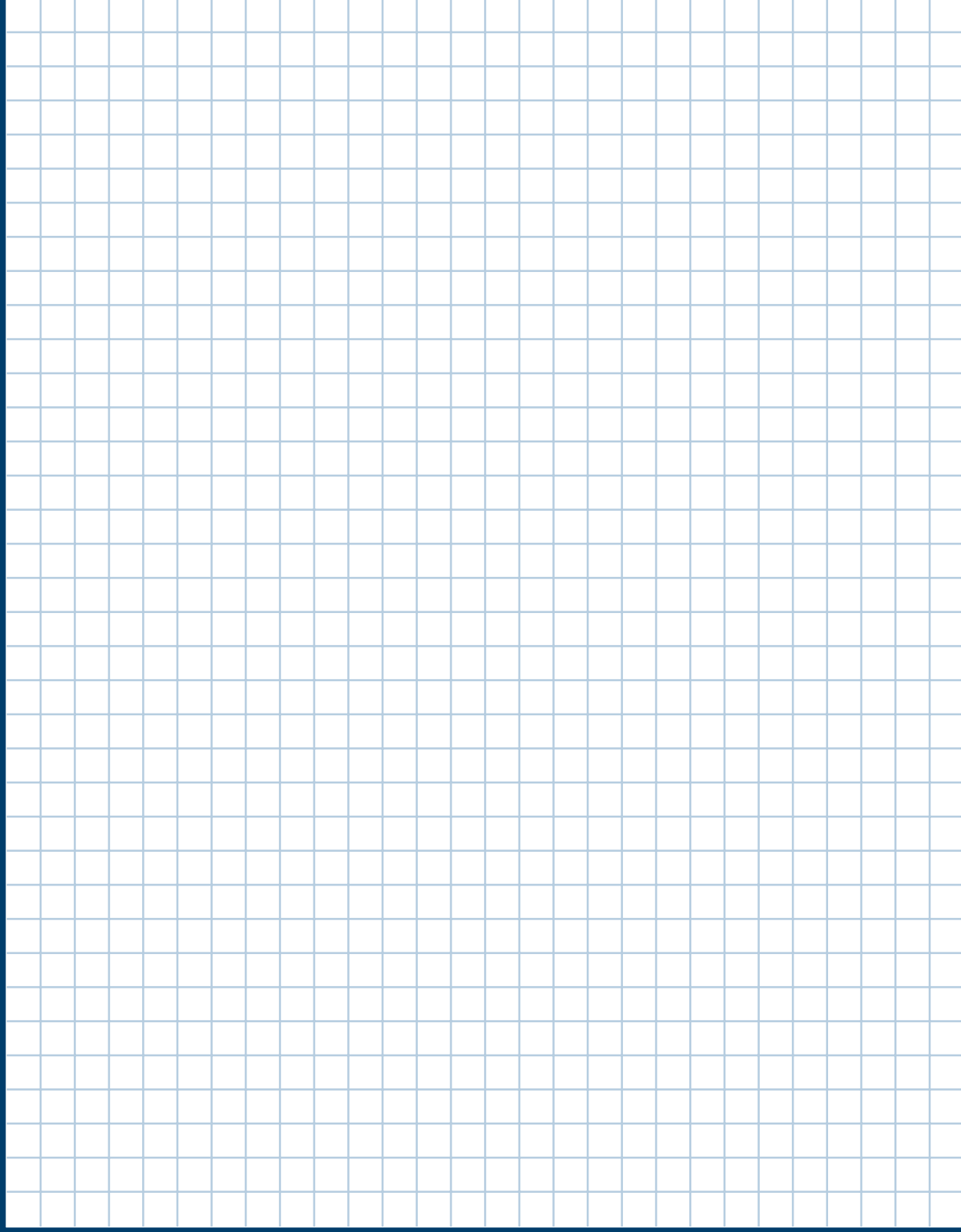
home fire safety tips

- Never leave cooking, heaters, open fires or candles unattended.
- Don't overload powerboards.
- Keep electrical appliances in good working order.
- Ensure cigarette ash and butts are extinguished. Never smoke in bed.
- Do not dry clothing too close to heaters.
- Clean lint filters on clothes dryers regularly and always let dryers complete the cool-down cycle.
- Store all matches and lighters out of reach of children.
- By law every home must have at least one working smoke alarm installed on each level of the house. Clean and check your alarms regularly and make sure they are working.
- Have a fire extinguisher and fire blanket and know how to use them.
- Have a fire escape plan and practise it.
- Do not deadlock yourself inside the house. Keep keys in the back of the lock or close by.

your home fire escape plan



- Draw your home floor plan in the grid and mark all the exits.
- Identify two ways out of every room.
- Decide on an outside meeting place, such as the letterbox.
- Practise your home fire escape plan regularly with the whole family.
- Keep this plan handy to remind everyone of the safe exits in case of fire. Stick it on your fridge.





Smoke alarms
Working smoke alarms save lives.
Test and clean your smoke
alarms regularly.

Heaters
Check your heater before
you use it for the first time
each winter.
Keep clothing, curtains and
toys at least one metre from
your heater.

Candles
Keep away from curtains.
Always use on non-
combustible surfaces.

Bedroom
Use one appliance only
for each outlet on a
powerboard.

Electric blankets
Turn on no more than
30 minutes before bed.
Turn off before you get
into bed.

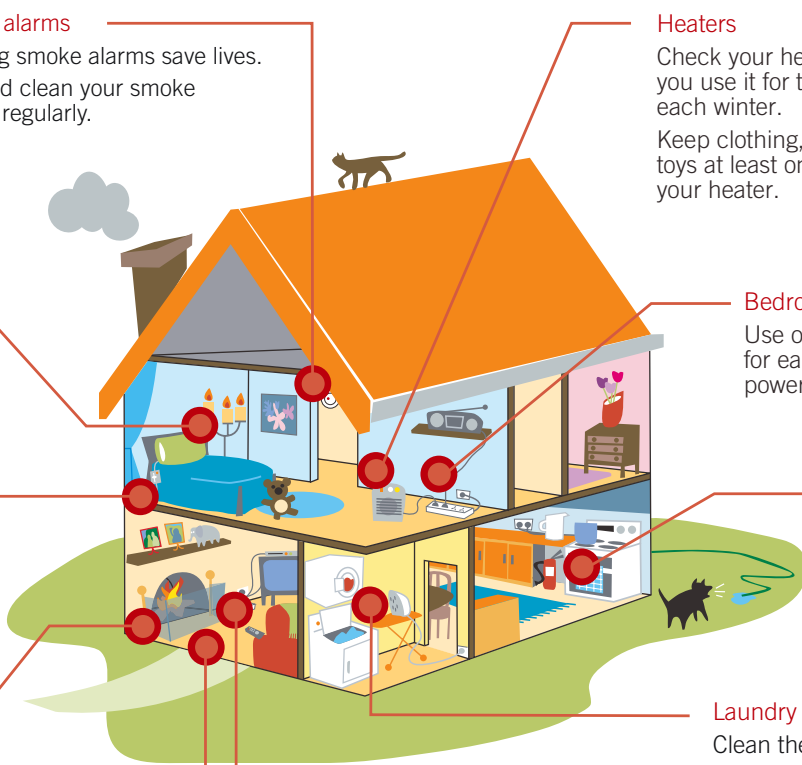
Kitchen
Know how to use
your fire blanket
and extinguisher.
Never leave
cooking
unattended.

Open fire place
Always place a screen in
front of an open fire.
Put out fires before going
to bed or going out.

Front door
Deadlocks should have the
keys left in them when you
are home.
Develop and practise your
home escape plan – have two
ways to escape each room.

Lounge room
Don't overload
powerpoints.
Replace damaged
power cords.

Laundry
Clean the lint filter
on your clothes dryer
after each use.
Let the dryer complete
its cycle – cool down is
essential.



www.checkyourhotspots.com

fire, police or ambulance call 000



For more information, go to
www.cfa.vic.gov.au or phone CFA
Community Safety on (03) 9262 8444