

Fire Safety in the Home

Fire safety in the home can be improved by a number of simple measures. Examples include installing and maintaining smoke detectors, keeping gutters clean, purchasing and regularly maintaining fire extinguishers, learning how to use fire extinguishers, keeping cars parked in a direction that facilitates evacuation, storing inflammable materials safely (e.g., gasoline in metal containers away from the house), and keeping areas around propane tanks clear of vegetation.

The following are examples of mitigation measures:

- Install fire suppression equipment, such as sprinkler systems and fire extinguishers.
- Install emergency exit lights to give direction as to where to move horses in a fire.
- Provide easy access to a corral large enough to hold the horses if they have to be evacuated. A gate system may help direct horses.
- Install wooden latches because metal ones may become too hot to open in a fire.
- Use leather halters because plastic ones may melt on the horse's face.
- Keep a lead rope at every stall door.

The value of smoke detectors is exemplified by the statistics in Table 10-2. The table clearly demonstrates the usefulness of smoke detectors in preventing death caused by fire. Other fire hazard detection devices are heat detectors, which detect flaming fires, and carbon monoxide detectors, which detect dangerous fumes. At nighttime doors should be kept closed because this will help prevent the spread of fire should a fire occur.

Table 10-2 Fires in one- or two-family dwellings and the use of smoke detectors

| Smoke detector status | Percent of fires | Percent mortality |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Present and operational | 15.2 | 8.2 |
| Present but not operational | 16.9 | 8.3 |
| Not present | 35.8 | 47.2 |
| Unknown | 37.1 | 35.8 |

From National Fire Data Center, USFA: *Fire in the US 1983-1990*, Washington, DC, 1993, FEMA.

Nearly 50% of all fatal fires in the home are associated with cigarettes and drinking alcohol, and fires are often started when people smoke in bed. Therefore people should refrain from smoking in bed, especially if tired or after drinking alcohol. Families also should agree on a meeting place after a fire, or any type of disaster, so that it becomes easy to ascertain that everybody is safe. Appliances (e.g., vacuum cleaners and power tools) should never be used when they are wet.