



Maine Farm Safety Program

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Fire Prevention in the Home

The best way to fight a fire is to prevent it from happening in the first place. There are several things families can do to lessen the chances of a fire starting in their homes. Some fires cannot be prevented, so families need to have a plan of action that everyone knows and has practiced in the event of a fire.

Fire Escape Plan

Do you have a fire escape plan for your home and farm? Do all your family members and workers know where the fire extinguishers are? Do you have smoke alarms installed, and are they functioning properly? Does the fire department know where water can be obtained near your home and farm? If you can answer yes to these questions, you are on the right track. If not, a more detailed plan needs to be developed.

Planning is the best way to prepare for a fire. Make a fire escape plan and practice it. Remember to include children because they often panic during fires and hide in closets and under beds where they can't be found. Hold fire drills. Discuss the results, and improve the procedure. Place fire extinguishers on every floor, and read the

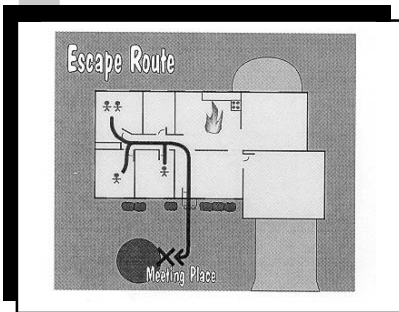
Fire Prevention in the Home

- **Install and check smoke detectors.**
- **Have a fire escape plan for your family and practice it.**
- **If a building is on fire, get out and stay out.**
- **Place a fire extinguisher on every floor in the home.**
- **Keep combustible materials away from heat sources.**
- **Never smoke in bed.**
- **Keep holiday greens away from heat sources.**

instructions out loud so everyone knows how to use them. Install smoke alarms, and put a rope ladder near an upstairs window.

Here is a basic fire escape plan:

1. Make an outline of the entire floor area.
2. Add each room, label the map.
3. Locate windows, doors, and stairways. Show rooftops that also can be used. Can each escape route really be used in an emergency?
4. Select the best window in each room. Test it to be sure it works easily and it is large and low enough. Can children unlock and open windows?
5. Have two escape plans. Use black arrows to show normal exits through the hall or stairway; colored arrows for alternative routes if fire blocks the hallway or stairs.
6. Keep all exit routes clear of any objects and debris. Nothing should be in the way to hinder escape.
7. Designate a meeting place outside. If you can, the front of your home is the best place. That is where the fire department will arrive. Once outside, make it clear that no one goes back in for any reason until the fire department says it's safe.



8. Practice exit drills. Although a smoke detector gives you extra time, you still need to know what to do when a fire occurs. If you have planned and practiced an escape, you will know! The more you practice, the better the chances that you and your family will act from practice and not from panic. Plan a drill at least once every six months.

Adapt this plan to your barns and other farm buildings. Make sure all who work within them know the fire escape plans.

General Housekeeping

Inspect your house and outbuildings for fire hazards. Check the electrical system, all appliances, equipment, fuel storage, the heating system, stoves and portable heaters. Make needed repairs without delay. Remove fire hazards such as trash, clutter, stacks of newspapers and other unneeded flammable materials.

Equip your house and garage with fire extinguishers. Consult a fire authority or fire protection dealer concerning specific needs. Also, install smoke detectors on every floor of your home. Test them regularly. Replace batteries once a year. Use an anniversary, when you turn your clocks back, or some other annual event to remind you to replace the batteries. If your smoke detector is more than 10 years old, replace it with a new one.

Follow directions on containers or labels of flammable products. Store them in their original containers. Store small amounts of fuel in approved, labeled safety containers. Make sure household bottled gas tanks are at least three or more feet from a window or door and not closer than six feet from a lightning rod cable.

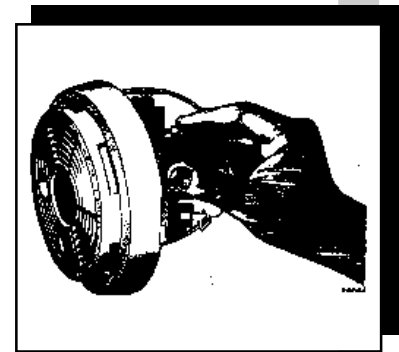
Burn well away from buildings. Carefully manage fires when burning land. Always obtain the proper permits before burning. Do not burn on windy days.

Heating Equipment

Modern home heating systems are safe when properly operated and maintained. Fire hazard increases when papers, rags or trash accumulate around stoves, furnaces or gas water heaters. Faulty chimneys and dirty or poorly functioning equipment also increase the chance of fire.

Homes may be heated in a variety of ways. When heating with wood, test and clean each chimney before the heating season begins. Check for leaks in the chimney by building a smudge: cover the top of the flue and then examine the whole length of the chimney to check for escaping smoke. Inspect wood stoves at least once a year for cracks or weakened parts. Keep all flammable objects away from all heat sources. Do not use gasoline, kerosene or outdoor grill starter fluids to start fires in heating stoves or fireplaces. Use paper or kindling to start fires in wood stoves or fireplaces.

Portable electric, kerosene or oil-burning heaters need to be protected. They should not be easily tipped over or come near flammable materials. Also watch for carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide detectors are available at local department and hardware stores. Dispose of electric heaters without thermostats or tip-over protection.



Smoking

If you smoke, do it with care. Don't smoke where there is a risk of igniting combustible or flammable materials. Do not smoke when drowsy or in bed. Never flick a cigarette butt or knock out a pipe in a wastebasket or trash can. Make sure ashes and cigarette butts in ashtrays are completely out before disposing of them.

Holiday Greens

If you decorate your home with holiday greens (wreaths, trees, garland), make sure they are fresh. Change the greens as they dry out. Keep a Christmas tree watered to prevent drying. Set a tree so that it cannot tip. Keep the tree away from heaters, fireplaces, curtains and other objects. Trim with non-flammable ornaments and check light strings for defects. Turn off tree lights before going out or retiring for the evening.



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This Maine Farm Safety fact sheet is part of an educational fact sheet series produced by University of Maine Cooperative Extension. For more information on farm safety, contact your county Extension office.

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