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A MESSAGE FOR YOU

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Electrical Safety Measures for Older Adults

Statistics show that home fires, from a variety of causes, result in a significant number of deaths and injuries each year. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), U.S. fire departments respond to an estimated average of 371,700 home structure fires per year. These fires cause an estimated average of 2,590 civilian deaths and 12,910 civilian injuries.

Although electrical hazards plague the public at large, older adults are burdened with the gravest risk. Adults over the age of 65 are more than twice as likely to die from a house fire as the general population, and this risk increases with age. Those 75 years of age and over are challenged with a risk that is 2.8 times higher, and adults over 85 are at a staggering risk that is 3.7 times higher. As baby boomers enter retirement age, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) has predicted that the percentage of older Americans will increase significantly, thus making a corresponding increase in fire deaths and injuries among older adults probable.

Electrical failures are a leading cause of home fires every year, and electrical distribution and lighting equipment fires have been shown to increase in frequency with increasing dwelling age. Homes with aging electrical systems are at a heightened risk for electrical fires, posing a serious risk for older adults who have remained in the same home for an extended period of time.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, half of the homes in use in the United States were built before 1973, which is long before many of the electronics and appliances we use today were even invented. Unfortunately, our increased demands for energy can overburden an older home's electrical system causing fires or electrocutions.

Many home electrical fires can be prevented by using more up-to-date technology and by recognizing warning signs your home may be showing. Follow these easy safety tips to identify and prevent electrical hazards in your home:

- **Regularly check all cords, outlets, switches, and appliances** for signs of damage or wear.
- **Use extension cords only temporarily.**
- **Be sure that outlets are not overloaded** with too many devices. They can overheat and start a fire.

- **Look and listen for warning signs** of an electrical problem such as outlets and switches that are warm, or make crackling, sizzling or buzzing sounds.
- **Always replace fuses or circuit breakers** with the correct size and amperage. And make sure all circuits are labeled correctly.
- **Consider having your breakers upgraded** to state-of-the-art AFCI circuit breakers. Keep the electrical panel accessible so you can quickly shut off power in an emergency.
- **Install smoke alarms on every level of your home.** Place alarms inside each bedroom and outside each sleeping area. Test them once a month, change the batteries at least once a year, and replace the alarm itself every ten years.

A full range of resources for older adults, including detailed fact and tip sheets as well as public service announcements, can be found by visiting esfi.org/safetieducators.





Start Saving with a Do It Yourself Home Energy Audit

Armed with some basic knowledge and a little time, you can conduct a baseline energy audit of your home to identify where you are losing energy (and money). Use a checklist and take notes on problems you find as you walk through your home. Remember, the audit itself won't save you money unless you act on your findings.

DIY 101

So, where to start? If your home has multiple levels, work from the top down. Begin in your attic or highest floor, and work your way down to the first floor or basement.

1 Insulation and air leaks (drafts)

According to the Department of Energy, improving your home's insulation and sealing air leaks are the fastest and most cost-effective ways to reduce energy waste and make the most of your energy dollars. Check to see whether there is sufficient insulation in the attic. Are openings containing piping, ductwork and chimneys sealed?

2 Electronic devices

Inventory all of the electronic devices you have and how often you use them. Computers, printers, DVD players, phones and gaming consoles are notorious "vampire power" users—they drain energy even when not in use. If items can be turned off without disrupting your lifestyle, consider plugging them into a power strip that can be turned on and off (or put on a timer).

3 Lighting

Note where you still have incandescent lights. Can you replace them with CFL or LED upgrades? Do you have nightlights? If so, consider replacing them with LED nightlights. Are there places where you can install motion sensor lights in low use areas, such as a closet, porch, or garage?

4 Thermostat/indoor temperature

Do you have a programmable thermostat? When was the last time it was programmed? Is the date and time, correct? If they are not, this could throw off the automatic settings. Is it set so the temperature is lower during the day and/or times when no one is home and at night when people are sleeping? Consider lowering the temperature a few degrees.

5 Appliances and cleaning

Appliances are large energy users, and if yours are more than 10 years old, they are not as energy efficient as today's options. How and when you use them also makes a difference. Do you wash your clothes in hot water, or can you use cold water instead? Do you use your washer, dryer, or dishwasher during the day? Consider running them at night, during off-peak times. Does your hot water heater have a blanket? If not, consider insulating it. Make sure your dryer vent is not blocked—this will not only save energy, but it may also prevent a fire.

Evaluation

Once you have completed the audit, take a look at the findings. Prioritize actions that you can take based on your time and budget, weighing where you can get the most impact for your investment. Increasing your home's energy efficiency will make your family comfortable while saving you money.



5 Ways to Save During Winter

Winter weather typically means increased energy use at home. Keep your bills in check with these tips to save energy—and money!

Mind the thermostat. If you have a traditional heating and cooling system, set the thermostat to 68 degrees or lower. Consider a smart or programmable thermostat for additional savings.

Get cozy. Add layers of clothing for additional warmth, and snuggle up under your favorite heavyweight blanket.

Don't block the heat. If your air vents or heating elements (like radiators) are blocked by furniture or rugs, your home isn't being adequately heated.

Take advantage of sunlight. Open window coverings during the day to let natural sunlight in to warm your home. Close them at night to block the chilly night air.

Block air leaks. Seal windows and exterior doors with caulk and weather stripping to improve indoor comfort and decrease the amount of energy used to heat your home.



Just as the demand for electricity fluctuates, so does the price. Shifting energy-intensive chores to off-peak hours when demand is lower is a smart, cost-effective choice for you and our community.

Purchasing Space Heaters and Space Heater Safety

When used correctly, space heaters can provide your space with added warmth and comfort during winter months. When buying and installing a small space heater, follow these guidelines:

- **Safety:** Newer model small space heaters have current safety features. Make sure the heater carries the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) label. Keep heaters at least 3 feet away from children, pets and flammable materials.
- **Size:** Choose a thermostat-controlled heater because they avoid the energy waste of overheating a room. Select a heater of the proper size for the room

you wish to heat. Do not purchase oversized heaters. Most heaters come with a general sizing table.

- **Type:** If you're just looking to heat part of a room, choose a radiant heater which emits infrared radiation that heats up whatever is closest to the unit. If you want to heat up the whole room, opt for a convection heater, which warms up the air. Both can range from about \$30 to \$130.



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Energy Efficiency

TIP OF THE MONTH

Do you have a home office? Set equipment like printers and scanners to automatically switch to sleep or energysaver mode when not in use. In addition to saving energy, the equipment will stay cooler, which will help extend its life.



Another way to save in the home office is to use energy efficient lamps for task lighting. Small lamps use less energy than whole-room lighting.



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