



Protect your home from fire:

Introduction

This module has been prepared to assist you and your scheme in understanding and applying improvements to fire protection in the home.

The aim of this module is to guide you by applying common sense and some basic knowledge which can have an impact on the risk from fire in your home and neighbourhood.

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- understand the need for a basic fire safety survey;
- anticipate potential risks;
- discover strengths and weaknesses in the fire safety of your buildings;
- identify priorities for action;
- have confidence that you and your Neighbourhood Watch group can help your community.

This module is in two parts:

- Part one contains the Development Notes which include separate fact sheets on different aspects of protection from fire.
- Part two contains the Session Notes with suggested activities and their answers.



PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM FIRE

Notes



Protect your home from fire:

Development Notes

Fire safety – advice for all

Every year the fire brigade is called out to over 60,000 fires in the home.

And every year around 500 people die in these fires and over 10,000 are injured.

If a fire occurs in your home, your chances of survival will depend on how quickly and safely you are able to get out. These notes give you advice on how to prevent a fire, and how to protect yourself should one occur.

These notes are divided into two fact sheets.

- How to stop a fire starting in your home.
- What to do if a fire starts.



How to stop a fire starting in your home

Almost all fires in the home can be prevented. Here are some fire safety tips which could help prevent a fire from starting in your home.

Chip pans and deep fat fryers

Fact

Cookers were the source of fire in over half the accidental dwelling fires during 1996. Many of these involved chip pans and other utensils left unattended. Most of these fires could have been prevented.

What can you do?

- Before putting food in the pan, dry the food, and test the temperature of the oil by putting in a small piece of bread. If the bread crisps up quickly the oil is ready.
- Never fill a pan more than one-third full of fat or oil.
- If you need to leave the kitchen **switch off** the pan.
- If the oil begins to smoke the temperature is too high. Turn off the heat source.

If the pan does catch fire

- Don't move it.
- Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so, but never lean over the pan to reach the cooker controls.
- Cover the pan with a damp cloth, for example a damp tea towel, and leave it to cool for at least 30 minutes - never throw water onto the fire.
- Always call the fire brigade. It is free and they will check the fire is safely out.

If you are in any doubt about whether to put out a chip pan fire yourself, then don't. Leave the room, close the door and let the fire brigade tackle the fire.



Open fires

These should always have a fireguard round them, but never rest clothes or place newspapers on the guard.

Portable heaters

Don't sit closer than three feet away from a heater. Never put a heater near clothes or furnishings.

Smokers' materials

Fact

Smoking materials were the source of fire in nearly half the fire deaths in dwellings during 1996.

What can you do?

- Never leave a lit cigarette or pipe unattended - it may fall onto an armchair or carpet which will soon catch fire and start to give off dense smoke and fumes.
- Never smoke in a chair if you think you may doze off in it.
- Always keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children.



Bedtime routine

Fact

Many fires in the home start at night. Make sure you have a bedtime fire safety routine to help keep you and your family safe.

What can you do?

- Switch off and unplug all electrical appliances not designed to stay on.
- Make sure no cigarettes or pipes are still burning. Never smoke in bed.
- Before emptying ashtrays make sure the contents are cold.
- Switch off portable heaters.

Doors

Fact

A door can hold back a fire for up to 20 minutes. This will protect your escape route, but will not affect the operation of your smoke alarm.

What can you do?

- Close all doors at night.



Get a smoke alarm

Fact

A smoke alarm will not stop fire, but it will give you those precious minutes of warning which can help you and your family get out safely.

Fires discovered by smoke alarms:

- are discovered more rapidly after ignition;
- are associated with lower casualty rates;
- cause less damage.

What can you do?

- Smoke alarms cost from under £5 and are simple to install. They are widely available from DIY, hardware and electrical shops and some supermarkets. Choose an alarm which meets British Standard BS5446 Part 1 and carries the Kitemark.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to fit and position the alarm. If you have difficulties, local voluntary organisations may be able to make arrangements to have the alarm fitted for you. The instructions will also give you guidance on battery replacement and maintenance.
- Change the batteries in the smoke alarms annually - perhaps on a child's birthday or other anniversary, that will help you to remember
- Your local fire brigade is a good source of information about fitting and using smoke alarms.



Smoke alarms for people with hearing impairments

Many people whose hearing is impaired are still able to hear a conventional smoke alarm. It is a good idea to link two or more alarms. This way smoke detected in the living room will set off another alarm in the bedroom. An electrician will be able to advise you about linking the alarms.

For people who would not be able to hear a conventional smoke alarm, there are special devices available which make use of a vibrating pad or flashing light instead of the auditory signal – the vibrating pad alarms are particularly useful for deaf-blind people. These devices are available from:

Universal Aids Ltd

814 Wellington Road South, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 1AA
Tel: 0161 480 9228

Summit CP

6 Key Hill Drive, Hockley, Birmingham B18 5NY
Tel: 0121 554 6946

Arc Fire Protection

14 Mitchell Close, Segensworth East Industrial Estate, Fareham,
Hampshire PO15 5SE
Tel: 014895 82789

Further information is available from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, listed in the 'Contacts' section of this package.

You may also find it useful to contact local voluntary organisations or the Social Services Department who may be able to offer advice and assistance on products specially designed to help people with disabilities.

Your local fire brigade will also be able to provide help and advice.



Planning your escape route

Fact

If you need to escape from your home it may be dark and in difficult conditions.

But planning your escape route is easy.

What can you do?

- Make sure that your planned escape route remains free of any obstructions and that there are no loose floor coverings that could trip you.
- Everyone in the house should be made aware of the escape route.
- Consider the options if your first escape route becomes blocked. Where are the doors and windows that could provide an alternative? If escape is possible from the first floor of your home, are there any flat roofs or porches that will help you get down to the ground?
- If you have security locks fitted to doors or windows, do people know where the keys are kept?
- If you have serious mobility difficulties you may wish to consider having your bedroom on the ground floor, if this is practical, and as near as possible to an exit. If you would need assistance to make your escape, it is vital that you have some means of summoning help by your bed, for example a buzzer, intercom or telephone.
- There are also systems available which will automatically dial out on your telephone line to summon help or send a signal to a manned control room. Details of the many emergency call/alarm systems available can be obtained from the Disabled Living Foundation who produce a booklet on the subject.



What to do if a fire starts

We all try to prevent fire starting in our home.

But it only takes an unguarded or careless moment for a fire to start. A couple of minutes later and your home could be filled with smoke. Smoke and fumes can kill – particularly the highly poisonous smoke from some furnishings.

You will only have a short time to get out. Use it wisely and try not to panic.

If possible, close the door of the room where the fire is and close all doors behind you as you leave. This will help delay the spread of fire and smoke.

Before opening a closed door, use the back of your hand to touch it. Don't open it if it feels warm – the fire will be on the other side.

Get everyone out as quickly as possible. Don't try to pick up valuables or possessions. Make your way out as safely as you can and try not to panic.

It will help if you have planned your escape route rather than waiting until there is a fire.

Telephone the fire brigade on 999 from a neighbour's house or a telephone box. Clearly state the address of the fire.

Never go back into the house until a fire officer has told you it is safe to do so.



If you are cut off by fire

Fact

Simple action may help save the lives of you and your family.

What can you do?

- If you are unable to use the door because of flames or smoke, close the door and use towels or sheets to block any gaps. This will help stop smoke spreading into the room.
- Try to make your way to the window.
- If the room becomes smoky, crawl along the floor where it's easier to breathe because smoke rises.
- If there are no smoke and flames on the other side of the window, open the window and try to attract the attention of others who can alert the fire brigade. Wait for the fire brigade to arrive.
- The fire brigade should arrive in a matter of minutes. If you are in immediate danger and your room is not too high from the ground, drop cushions or bedding to the ground below to break your fall from the window. If you can, get out feet first and lower yourself to the full length of your arms before dropping.



For further information, help and advice

Your local council or your fire brigade will be happy to advise you on fire prevention and safety.

If you are looking for a good electrician, for example, ask friends and neighbours to introduce you to trustworthy people they know about. Elderly people especially should try to have someone they know with them when they have asked someone they **don't** know to call at their home. Your local Age Concern or Citizens Advice Bureau can give advice on what local voluntary groups there may be to help you, and what benefits may be due to you. Their addresses and telephone numbers can be obtained from your local telephone directory or public library.

The following addresses may be useful for people with disabilities:

Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU
Tel: 0171 289 6111 Fax: 0171 266 2922.

National Federation of the Blind of the UK

Unity House, Smyth Street, Westgate, Wakefield, West Yorkshire
WF1 1ER
Tel: 01924 291313.

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)

Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF
Tel: 0171 250 3222
Fax: 0171 250 0212
Textphone: 0171 250 4119 (Minicom).

Royal National Institute for the Blind

224 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AA
Tel: 0171 388 1266
Fax: 0171 388 2034.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People

9-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Tel: 0171 296 8000
Fax: 0171 296 8199
Textphone: 0171 296 8001 (Minicom).



Publications

- A booklet, 'Fire safety in the home' (reference FSH1) is available in large print and Braille versions.
- An audio cassette called 'Fire safety in the home' (reference FPT1) is also available from the Home Office. This tape gives general advice on fire prevention and what to do in the event of a fire.

Other fire safety leaflets produced by the Home Office are:

- 'Electrical safety leads to fire safety' (Ref FL04)
- 'Wake up! Get a smoke alarm' (Ref FB2)
- 'How to choose and use fire extinguishers for the home' (Ref FB3)

The above material is free to individuals and publicly funded organisations. A charge will be made to commercial organisations. Orders can be made by sending a fax to 0171 273 2568 quoting the appropriate reference.



Notes



Protect your home from fire:

Session Notes

About these notes

These Session Notes contain an outline for how you can use the Development Notes on fire safety to run short training sessions with the members of your scheme.

Because the needs of your Neighbourhood Watch scheme are unique, this session has been left as flexible as possible. The sessions are based round two activities.

Activities

There are two separate activities in these Session Notes:

- **Activity one:** Protect your home from fire
- **Activity two:** Protect your neighbourhood from fire

Activity one involves some work in individual homes. Activity two is a group discussion activity.

Each activity has notes with points for discussion and answers to some of the questions.

The resources you will need

A copy of the relevant fact sheet for each member of the group and the activities from these notes.



Session preparation

Before you run any sessions on fire safety you should find out exactly what your scheme members need to know. You could include fire safety as a discussion item at one of your meetings. This would help you find out:

- whether people want information on the subject;
- what aspects they are most interested in.

With this information you will be able to plan ahead and include fire safety on the agenda for one or more of your meetings.



Activity one: Protect your home from fire

Aims of this activity

The aim of this activity is to get individual scheme members to look critically at the fire safety in their own homes. By the end of this activity individuals will be able to identify:

- weak spots in the fire safety of their home;
- steps they can take to improve safety.

How to use this activity

There are three stages to this activity:

Stage one

At your Neighbourhood Watch meeting give out a copy of the fact sheet 'How to stop a fire starting in your home' and the questions that go with the activity. Allow 10-15 minutes for the group to read through the fact sheet and discuss any points they wish to make.

Stage two

Individual group members carry out a survey of their own home and note down the answers to the questions.

Stage three

At your next Neighbourhood Watch meeting use the answer sheets with this activity and discuss the results of individual surveys. You can ask each individual to make a short presentation to the rest of the group if you wish. You should make your discussion last no longer than an hour.



Activity one: Protect your home from fire – questions

Assessing the risks and solutions

Walk around your home and identify potential risks from fire. Don't forget to look at sheds and outbuildings.

List the areas of weakness you have discovered on your walk-about.

You should make notes about:

- risks from cookers, open fires, portable heaters, electrical appliances and smoking materials, and any possible solutions;
- whether you follow a bedtime routine of checks;
- whether you have any smoke alarms fitted and where;
- any escape route you could use and alternative routes.



Activity one: Protect your home from fire – answers

Assessing the risks and solutions

Discuss the group's answers using the fact sheet as a checklist.

Look at:

- areas of risk;
- the use of fire alarms;
- escape routes.

Discuss any special problems which the group found or any special needs required by people with disabilities.

Allow 30 minutes for the discussion.

Finally, give the group a copy of the fact sheet 'What to do if a fire starts'. Allow them 10 minutes to read the fact sheet and then allow 10-15 minutes to discuss any questions.



Activity two: Protect your neighbourhood from fire

Aims of this activity

The aim of this activity is to get the group to look critically at fire safety in the neighbourhood and what you could do collectively as a scheme. By the end of this activity the group will be able to identify:

- areas where the scheme can work as a whole to improve neighbourhood security;
- steps they can take to improve the security.

How to use this activity

There are three stages to this activity:

Stage one

Introduce the topic and split the group into three or four smaller groups. Give each group a copy of the activity questions.

Stage two

Each group discusses the questions and writes down their answers. Allow 20 minutes for this activity.

Stage three

Bring the meeting together and discuss each group's findings.



Activity two: Protect your neighbourhood from fire – questions

What steps can your Neighbourhood Watch group take?

Make a list of the steps that your scheme could take to improve fire safety in your area.

Think in particular about:

- areas that may be vulnerable to arson, such as school buildings, abandoned buildings or rubbish tips;
- elderly or disabled people who may require special help.



Activity two: Protect your neighbourhood from fire – answers

What steps can your Neighbourhood Watch group take?

- You may consider holding meetings to discuss fire safety and the implications of proposals in your community. Invite a representative from your local fire brigade.
- Do many people need smoke alarms? You may be able to negotiate group discounts with a local supplier/fitter.
- Can you provide special help to any particularly vulnerable people in your area? This could include helping them to make their homes more secure from fire or keeping an eye on their homes.
- Are there any vulnerable targets in your area? Joint action, such as letters and petitions to your local council, is often most effective.