

Kitchen Fire Prevention

A Hazard in the Home

Half of house fires begin in the kitchen, and kitchen fires are the leading cause of house-fire injuries and many deaths. Most kitchen fires are due to human error.

Preventing kitchen fires and injuries takes one part common sense and a few parts preparation. Take stock of your:

- Kitchen's layout, equipment, and cleanliness.
- Cooking habits.
- Ability to put out a small fire safely.
- Knowledge of burn-injury prevention.

Clean and Safe

A clean kitchen is a safer kitchen. Wipe up spills as they happen. Clean crumbs and grease buildup from cooking appliances regularly. Clean the exhaust hood and duct over the stove on a regular basis. Grease can catch fire easily, and grease fires can be difficult to put out. Keep messes under control to avoid these risks altogether.

First Aid for Burns

Act fast to limit the severity of burns. Run cool water over a minor burn for 10 to 15 minutes to limit its seriousness. Never use grease or butter on a burn. If burned skin is blistered, see a doctor. For blackened skin, shallow breathing, or unconsciousness, call the fire department or ambulance service.

Recipe for Safety

Careless cooking starts more residential fires than any other cause. Cooking accidents also hurt people – more are injured in the kitchen than from any other fire-related cause. Brush up on kitchen safety and cook smart.

The Kitchen: Get It Together

Organize and decorate the kitchen for looks and safety. Everyday objects may end up causing destructive blazes.

Do not store anything flammable on the stove. Curtains, potholders, dishtowels, and decorative items need to be at least 3 feet from the stove.

Get an ABC fire extinguisher for the kitchen and learn how to use it. Keep the extinguisher in easy reach near the kitchen's exit – not in a cabinet.

Make sure the control knobs on the stove, oven, and other hot appliances are easy to read. You should be able to tell from across the room whether a heat-producing appliance is on or off.

Check toasters, coffeemakers, and electric skillets for overheating and wear. Signs of possible damage are cracks, melting, or discoloration of cords or plastic surfaces.

Do not overload electrical outlets. It can cause overheating. This is especially true with heat-producing appliances like toasters or coffeepots.

Safe Steps

It is easy to develop bad cooking habits. Don't get burned.

- Never leave food cooking unattended.
- Cook with the lowest effective temperature.
- Do not store cooking fat on the stovetop. A burner could be turned on, accidentally starting a grease fire.
- Plug in appliances only when they are in use.
- Keep metal out of the microwave - even a twist-tie or a bit of aluminum foil can cause "arcing," which can lead to fire.
- Wear close-fitting clothing when you cook. Avoid loose sleeves, ties, or ruffles.
- Keep pot handles turned toward the back of the stove. An adult may brush against the handle, or a child may pull the pot off of the stove and be burned.
- Supervise young children in the kitchen.
- Do not touch or try to move a flaming pot. You may spread the fire and/or burn yourself.
- Slowly remove lids from containers that have been in the microwave oven. The steam that builds up inside containers can cause serious scalds.

Putting Out the Flames

Never try to put out a fire yourself unless:

- You have called the fire department.
- You know what is burning.
- You have the necessary supplies (pan lid or correct fire extinguisher).
- The fire is small and not spreading.
- Everyone else has left the area.
- You have a clear path to the exit.

Never use water, baking soda, or flour on a grease fire. Instead, carefully slide a lid over the pan from the side, and turn off the stove. Keep the lid over the fire until flames are out.

Smother a fire in a conventional oven or microwave oven by keeping the door closed. Unplug or turn off the unit. Have the microwave serviced before using it again.

If paper, cloth, or food (other than grease) is burning, it may be safe to use an A or ABC fire extinguisher, if you know how. A fire extinguisher labeled C, BC, or ABC can be used on an electrical fire.

If the fire does not go out right away, exit. If you haven't done so already, call the fire department, using a neighbor's phone.