



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

Fire safety in the home

Your guide to help protect you
and your family from fire



0300 303 0088
essex-fire.gov.uk/book

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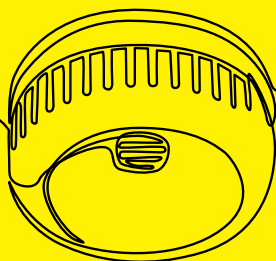
Fire safety in your home

Fires can start in any room and the effects can be devastating. Knowing how to reduce the risk of fire in your home can help to keep everyone safe.

Here are our 10 top tips for staying safe:

1. Make sure you have smoke alarms on every level of your home.
2. Smoke alarms save lives, but only if they are working. Test them at least once a month.
3. Take extra care in the kitchen and never leave cooking unattended.
4. Avoid using a deep fat fryer or any other pan filled with hot oil.
5. Do not overload electric sockets – most can only take a maximum of 13 amps.
6. Keep matches and lighters away from children.
7. Keep clothes well away from heaters and open fires.
8. Put out cigarettes properly, dispose of them carefully in a proper ashtray and empty it regularly.
9. Do not charge electrical items such as mobile phones, tablets, vapes, e-bikes or e-scooters overnight.
10. Plan an escape route and make sure everyone knows how to get out in the event of a fire.

Protect your home with smoke alarms



**The easiest way to
protect your home and
family from fire is with
working smoke alarms.**

**They can only protect
you if they work.
Get it. Install it.
Check it.
It could save your life.**

Smoke alarms for sensory loss

If you or someone you know is deaf or hard of hearing, you may benefit from a sensory smoke alarm which uses strobe lighting and a vibrating pad to alert you to a fire.

If you are unable to make a 999 call, you can register for the SMS 999 services which will link you to the emergency services – just text **“register” to 999**, you will get a reply with instructions to follow.

Top tip



**Fit smoke alarms
on every level of
your home**



Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms save lives. They will alert you to the first sign of fire, giving everyone in the property the time to get out safely.

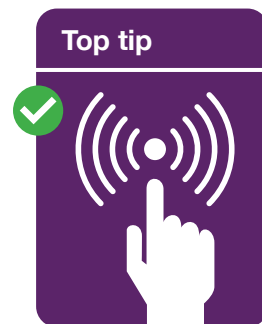
- Fit at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home, ideally on the hallway or landing ceilings.
- Please be aware that some children may not be woken by smoke alarms.
- Test your smoke alarms monthly.
- Change your smoke alarm every 10 years no matter if they are battery or hard wired.
- If your smoke alarm is making a 'chirping' noise, this means the battery has expired. Replace it immediately.
- Check your alarms have the SI kitemark symbol and the CE Mark, which shows the alarm is approved and safe.



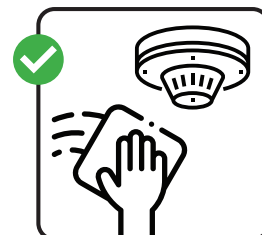
Looking after your smoke alarms

- Once a month – test the batteries
- Twice a year – gently vacuum to remove dust
- Every ten years – replace the entire smoke alarm

The smoke alarms we provide have a 10-year battery after which the alarm itself must be changed because the batteries cannot be replaced.



Test once a month



Buying and fitting your own smoke alarm?

If you have bought your own smoke alarms, please follow the manufacturer's instructions to ensure they are fitted and are working properly.



Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a silent killer, you cannot see it, taste it, or smell it. That is why it is important to install CO alarms in your home and know the symptoms of CO poisoning.

CO poisoning happens when any fuel-burning appliance has not been properly installed or maintained, or in cases of poor ventilation. Sources include boilers, gas fires, central heating systems, water heaters, cookers and wood, gas, or coal open fires and BBQs.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- headache
- dizziness
- feeling sick or being sick
- feeling weak
- confusion
- chest and muscle pain
- shortness of breath

Carbon monoxide alarms need replacing every 8-10 years.

If you can smell gas or think there could be a leak, you should call Cadent immediately on 0800 111 999.

Fire safety at home



In this guide you'll find advice on staying safe while cooking, using electricals, heaters, candles and cigarettes. Keeping your home safe means spotting risks and taking action to reduce them.

In this section you will find some easy tips to help protect you and your family.

Kitchen

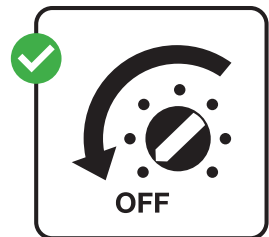
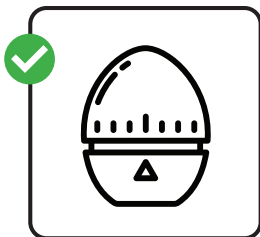
- Never leave pans unattended when cooking.
- Do not cook if you are tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that might make you drowsy.
- Do not leave items on top of your hob such as tea towels or papers, even when it is turned off.
- If the pan does catch fire, do not tackle the fire yourself or try to move the pan. Never throw water or a damp tea towel onto it as this will create a dangerous fireball.
- If you can do so safely, turn off the heat. Leave the room and close the door. Shout to warn others to get out, stay out and call 999.

Use a kitchen timer to remind you when you need to check on your food.

Top tip



Keep out of reach



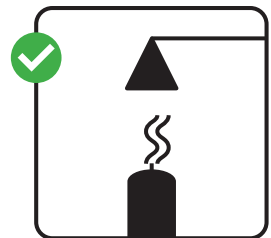
Candles

- Use LED candles instead of real candles – they are much safer and still give the same warm glow.
- Candles, tea lights and incense should only be placed in stable, heat-resistant holders.
- Keep them away from materials that may catch fire such as curtains, furniture, papers and clothes.
- Do not leave candles unattended.
- Use a snuffer rather than blowing to prevent embers spreading.

Use LED candles instead of real candles – they are much safer and still give the same warm glow.



**Be careful
with candles**



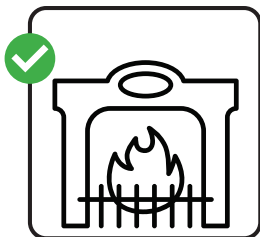
Safer heating

Portable heaters

- Keep it on a flat, stable surface away from flammable materials, furniture and clothing.
- Always unplug heaters or fans when you go out or go to bed.
- Do not use your electric heater for drying your washing or cover it with any materials.

Chimney fire safety

- Have your chimney swept at least once a year, or more frequently if you burn wood.
- Do not stack fires too high and let them burn down well before you go to bed
- Use a fire or spark guard.
- Only use suitable fuels. Using the wrong type of fuel will cause corrosion and reduce the life of the liner.



Clutter/Hoarding

Having lots of items in a room can cause serious problems; it could stop you from escaping in an emergency. It also means fires spread more quickly and makes it difficult for firefighters to put out a fire and rescue people.

1. Do not light candles or tea lights of any kind. A safer option is to use LED flameless candles.
2. If using portable heaters, make sure items are not placed on top of, or too close to them.
3. If you are a smoker, try to smoke outside, never smoke in bed or where you could fall asleep, and use proper ashtrays.
4. Keep escape routes clear.

If you, or someone you know, needs support with hoarding, go to the Essex County Council website and search “Hoarding”.

What to do if there is a fire

- If any of your smoke alarms go off, get out of your home by following your escape plan.
- Check closed doors with the back of your hand. Do not open the door if it feels warm – the fire may be on the other side.
- Smoke can kill, get down as low as possible where the air will be clearer.
- If your escape is blocked by fire, it may be safer to stay put until the fire service arrives. Close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke.
If you have a phone, call 999, go to a window, shout “HELP, FIRE” and wait to be rescued.



**Get out, stay out
and call 999**

How to escape from a high-rise building

- Make sure you, and everyone in your home, know the fire plan for your building and where fire alarms and fire exits are.
- As with all buildings, you should plan and practise an escape route.
- Avoid using lifts and balconies if there is a fire.
- It is easy to get confused in smoke, so count how many doors you need to go through to reach the stairs.
- Check that your way out is clear and that there is nothing in the corridors or stairways that could catch fire – like boxes or rubbish.
- Make sure doors to stairways are not locked.
- You should still get smoke alarms for your own home, even if there is a warning system in the block.



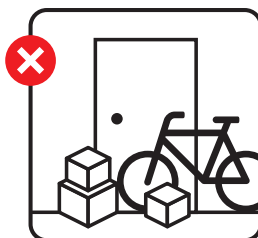
Plan a safe escape 5

If you have a fire in your home, do not try to tackle it yourself. Get out, stay out, call the fire service out.

- Make an escape plan and practise it regularly to make sure everyone knows how to get out safely.
- Never store anything in communal areas including balconies and stairways. Items can block your escape route and be a fire risk.
- Always keep door and window keys where everyone you live with can find them.



**Plan an
escape route**



Deliberate fires

Outdoor fires

- Keep BBQs away from sheds, trees and buildings.
- Do not leave fire pits or chimineas unattended.
- Site bonfires away from anything that could catch fire.

Arson

Arson is the act of deliberately setting a fire to damage or destroying something such as property or green space and/or endangering life.

There are some simple steps you can take to help protect your property from being a victim of arson.

Rubbish

Rubbish is a ready source of fuel for an arsonist, and fires involving rubbish can quickly spread to nearby homes and buildings putting lives at risk.

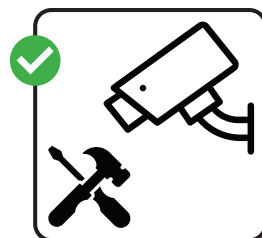
- Never store rubbish or anything that can catch alight in corridors, stair wells or escape routes.
- Keep communal bin stores secure and well lit.

Security

One of the best ways to prevent arson is making sure your property is secure. This includes unused and derelict buildings.

- Keep entry points to buildings secure, including sheds or garages, perimeter walls, fencing and gates.
- Consider installing security systems such as CCTV, alarms and security lighting.
- Keep any flammable substances stored safely and securely.

Do you have information about a deliberate fire? Report what you know anonymously to FireStoppers – call 0800 169 5558



Smoking

The best and safest option is not to smoke – it is harmful to your health and is the most common cause of fatal fires. For help or advice on quitting contact **Smokefree National Helpline: 0300 123 1044**.

If you are not ready to quit, take these simple precautions to prevent a fire:

- Smoke outside and always make sure cigarettes are put right out.
- Never smoke in bed or anywhere you could fall asleep.
- Do not leave any type of lit cigarette or pipe unattended.
- Use proper ashtrays and never throw hot ash into the bin.
- Keep matches and lighters well out of the reach of children.

If you have switched to vaping as an alternative, remember to follow the manufacturer's instructions. Always use the correct charger and never use an e-cigarette if it is damaged in any way and never charge it overnight.



Top tip



**Put them out.
Right out!**

Medicine and medical devices

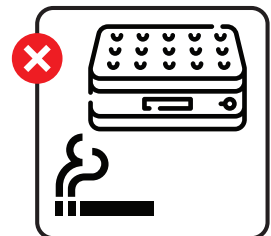
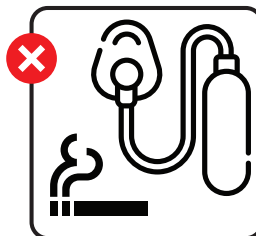
- Never smoke or let anyone else smoke nearby while using oxygen equipment, or for 20 minutes after. This includes vapes.
- Do not use matches or any naked flames (such as candles, incense sticks or oil burners, gas stoves, portable or open fires) where oxygen equipment is used.

Airflow mattresses

- Never smoke near an airflow mattress.
- Keep ignition sources (such as matches, cigarettes, candles, incense sticks or oil burners) away from airflow mattresses.
- Never use an electric blanket on an airflow mattress.
- Keep fires and heaters away from airflow mattresses.



**No naked flames
near oxygen
equipment**



Emollients

Emollient products are safe to use but can be a fire hazard because they contain paraffin. If the cream, gel, or ointment has dried into fabric and that fabric comes into contact with an ignition source, such as a cigarette, match, lighter, heater or candle, a fire can develop.

- Wash your clothing and bedding on a hot wash regularly to help reduce the build-up of products.
- Contact your GP to discuss alternative products, especially if you're a smoker or oxygen user.



Reduce build-up of products on your clothing

Alcohol, drugs, and medication

Research suggests that nationally more than half of home fire fatalities involve alcohol or drug-related behaviour. The cause is usually people falling asleep while cooking or smoking. Intoxication can also cause drowsiness and confusion, making you less alert to the signs of fire

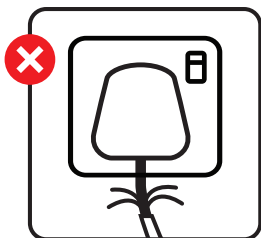
Being under the influence of alcohol, medication or drugs makes you more vulnerable. It can also cause drowsiness and make you less alert to the signs of fire or knowing how to respond correctly.

- Do not cook or start an open fire (fireplace or outside, e.g. barbecue or fire pit) if you are under the influence of alcohol, drugs or medication that can make you drowsy.
- If you are a smoker, do not smoke in bed – you could doze off and set your bed on fire.

Make sure you have working smoke alarms, as this will increase the chances of you escaping if fire breaks out in your home.

Electrical safety

- Never overload electrical sockets.
- If you must use an extension lead – know the limits.
- Only use chargers for the intended device.
- Do not leave items such as phones/tablets/vapes on continuous charge or plugged in overnight or while you are out of the house.
- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order.
- Only leave essential appliances switched on such as the fridge or freezer. Turn all other electrical items off when they are not in use.
- Only use chargers for their intended device.
- Look out for the CE mark that indicates chargers comply with European Safety standards.



E-bikes, e-scooters, and mobility scooters

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging and always unplug your charger when it is finished.
- Charge batteries while you are awake and alert so if a fire happens you can respond quickly. Do not leave batteries to charge while you are asleep or away from the home.
- Always use the manufacturer approved charger for the product.
- Avoid storing or charging e-bikes and e-scooters in escape routes. If there is a fire, it can affect people's ability to escape.
- Buy e-bikes, e-scooters and chargers and batteries from reputable retailers and ensure they meet all safety requirements
- If you think an electrical item is old or faulty in any way, do not use it. Get it fixed by a qualified person or recycle it at your nearest recycling centre.

Crime prevention

Many electrical fires involve counterfeit goods. Items which do not meet British or European standards pose a huge fire risk and while genuine chargers (or battery packs) may cost more, it is not worth putting your life at risk and potentially destroying your home by buying a fake charger to save a few pounds.

British Standards Kitemark:



European Standards Kitemark:



Follow our advice to keep your home safe from burglary, damage, doorstep theft and secure your outside.

- Secure your sheds and garages – they often contain tools which the burglar can use to assist them to gain entry to your home.
- Do not leave doors and windows open when you are not home.
- Remove keys from doors and windows, and keep them secure, but easily accessible.
- Always keep side gates locked. Open gates mean burglars can easily access your home without being seen by passers-by or neighbour.

For more crime prevention advice go to Essex Police's website: [essex.police.uk](https://www.essex.police.uk)

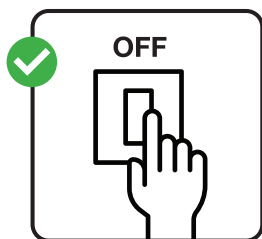


Bedtime checks

Before going to bed, you can help keep your family safe by checking your home for potential fire hazards. This will only take a few minutes, but it can help keep everyone safe while you sleep.



Close inside doors



Follow these simple bedtime checks to help keep your home safe.

- ☐ Close inside doors at night to stop a fire spreading.
- ☐ Turn off and unplug electrical appliances unless they are designed to be left on – like a freezer.
- ☐ Check your cooker is turned off.
- ☐ Do not leave appliances your washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher on at night.
- ☐ Turn heaters off and use fireguards.
- ☐ Put candles and cigarettes out properly.
- ☐ Make sure exits are kept clear.
- ☐ Keep door and window keys where everyone can find them.

Useful contacts

Fire Safety Intervention Scheme

If you know a child or young person involved with fire setting behaviours get in touch with us about our Fire Safety Intervention scheme. This is a free service that offers one to one support for children and young people, and aims to deter them from risky behaviour.

Go to: **essex-fire.gov.uk/fsi**

FireStoppers

Do you have information about a deliberate fire?
Report what you know anonymously to FireStoppers – call **0800 169 5558**

Online Home Fire Safety Check

Check your home is safe using our simple online tool. It only takes a few minutes to check your home and get tailored advice for your family.

Go to:
essex-fire.gov.uk/online

StayWise

StayWise is a free online library, packed full of educational resources and activities from the UK's leading emergency services, all designed to keep children safe.

Go to: **staywise.co.uk**

Feedback

If you've had a Home Safety Visit, we'd love to know if we got it right.

Please complete our short feedback survey to tell us what you think. Go to: essex-fire.gov.uk/feedback

Email: home.safety@essex-fire.gov.uk

Call: 0300 303 0088

Home Safety Team

Web: essex-fire.gov.uk/book

Email: home.safety@essex-fire.gov.uk

Call: 0300 303 0088

Stay informed

Sign up to receive our monthly newsletter with updates and important safety messages from your fire service.

Sign up here: essex-fire.gov.uk/signup

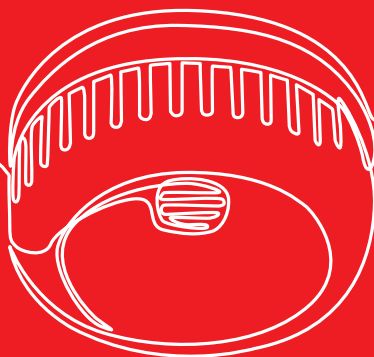
More information

For further fire safety advice, videos, different language translations and an audio version of this booklet, please visit our website: essex-fire.gov.uk/home





Essex County
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