

Vacation Fire Safety Checklist

Vacation

If you're planning a vacation and your home will be empty, you can go away with a freer mind and less worry if you check your home before leaving. Check to make sure that all stoves and electrical appliances have been turned off or disconnected.

Unplug all television sets and radios. Lightning storms or sudden electrical surges could cause a fire in this equipment while you're away. When you return from your vacation, check your smoke detector to make sure it is functioning. Batteries could run down or other components could fail while you're away.

When you are traveling away from home and staying in a motel or hotel, it is important to know survival actions in case there is a fire. Many significant fires have occurred in high rise hotels such as the MGM Grand in Las Vegas and the hotel fire in Panama.

Select a hotel or motel that, at a minimum, has a smoke detector installed. It is preferable to select lodging that also has fire sprinkler systems in place. If you must stay in a facility without smoke detectors or sprinklers, request a room on the first or second floor.

When you first get in your room, read the fire safety information provided. It is usually posted near or on the back of the entry door. Just like in your home, you need to plan your escape ahead of time. Locate the two exits nearest your room. Make sure the fire exit doors work and are unlocked. Locate the nearest fire alarm and read the operating instructions. In a real fire, the hallway may become dark with smoke so count the number of doors from your room to each exit. This way you will know where you are in case you get caught in a dark hallway. Keep your room key and a flashlight near the bed.

If you hear the fire alarm sound, or suspect a fire in the hotel, investigate, don't go back to sleep. If you see fire or smoke, call the hotel desk and the fire department immediately. Tell the person who answers the phone what room you are in.

If you hear the fire alarm, check the door with the back of your hand. If it is cool, slowly open the door and exit. If the door is hot or warm, leave it closed and stay in the room. Fill the bathtub with water. Place wet towels or sheets into cracks around the door to keep smoke out. Call the fire department and tell them you are trapped in your room, and give them the room number.

If the door is not hot and the hallway is not smoky, go to the closest fire exit. Be sure to take your room key with you. You might have to return to your room and want to be sure you can get back in. Crawl low under smoke down the hallway to the fire exit. Use a wet cloth over your nose and mouth. As you exit, pull the nearest fire alarm to warn other occupants, then leave the building. If you cannot go down, try to go up to

the roof. Attract attention so they will know where you are.

If a fire starts in your room, leave immediately and close the door behind you to confine the fire and smoke to the room. Activate the fire alarm and call the fire department once you are safely out of danger.

Never use an elevator under fire conditions. Always take the stairs when exiting from a high-rise building. Elevators can malfunction. Many are heat-activated and have been known to stop directly at the fire floor.

Camping

Going back to nature with camping means leaving behind some familiar conveniences. It means using some unfamiliar procedures. To make sure a camping trip is an enjoyable one, be sure to follow safety rules.

Some tents are manufactured from cotton, which is a flammable substance. Sometimes the fabric treatment used to make tents waterproof actually increases the flammability, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Buy a tent that is flame retardant. Remember, "flame retardant" doesn't mean fire-proof. A flying ember from a fire can land on the tent and ignite it in seconds.

There are other things in a tent that can burn such as sleeping bags, clothing and people. A tent should be sited upwind from any campfire or outside cooking or lighting devices. Create a three-foot clearing around the tent. Only use battery-operated lights near or inside it. Always refuel any heat-producing appliance, such as lanterns and stoves, outside a tent. Always store flammable liquids, such as gasoline, outside a tent.

Don't cook inside a tent.

When preparing a campfire, a site should be selected that is away from grass, trees and tents. An area 10 feet around the campfire should be cleared of ground litter, twigs, leaves and organic material, down to bare soil. The site also should be downwind from the sleeping area to prevent catching a tent or sleeping bag on fire from a spark or ember. Rocks should be placed directly around the campfire pit.

If weather conditions are especially dry and you don't really need a fire for cooking, don't build one. A small spark is all it takes to ignite dry grass and leaves. Be sure to pay close attention to forest conditions and warnings from the park service.

Never use gasoline to light a fire. It is extremely explosive. A fire should be lit using kindling or a lighter stick. Keep a pail of sand or water nearby in the event it is needed to control the fire or extinguish it. Wear tight-fitting cotton or wool clothing while working near the campfire. Always keep a careful eye on fires. Make sure children don't play near them.

Before you go to sleep at night or if you leave the campsite for a while, be sure to extinguish the fire. Many forest fires are started each year from unattended campfires or those that were not completely extinguished. Douse the fire with water or sand, break up the coals, add more water or sand, stir it with a stick and cover the dead

embers with dirt. Make sure the fire is completely out before bedding down or leaving the campsite.

If you're using a gas or liquid fuel camp stove or lantern, follow the manufacturer's directions. Make sure all connections are tight to avoid leaks. Never check for a gas leak with a lighted match. Instead, put a little soapy water on the connections. If the mixture bubbles, gas is seeping out. Don't try to use the appliance again until it's been checked by a professional. When using a camp stove or gas lantern, always fill it before each use. Do not refuel a hot stove or lantern. Wait until it cools off. Use a funnel to fill the appliances and wipe up all fuel spills before attempting to light it again.

When traveling with a camper trailer or recreational vehicle, use only electrically-operated or battery-operated lights inside. Maintain all appliances in a safe working condition and check them before use. Keep a fire extinguisher on board, preferably a multi-purpose one, and mount a smoke detector inside the vehicle.

When the vehicle is traveling down the road, shut down gas to stoves and water heaters by closing the fuel supply at the gas bottle.

Never operate combustion type or catalytic heaters inside closed campers or recreational vehicle. This could result in asphyxiation from either fumes or oxygen depletion.

Don't cook while the vehicle is underway. A sudden lurching of the vehicle may result in spilling of cooking grease, causing a fire.

Always fuel stoves or lanterns outside campers or recreational vehicles. Accumulation of vapors in the fueling process, from volatile fuels, could result in an explosion.

Avoid accumulating and storing combustibles such as newspapers and grocery bags in your vehicle.

Outdoors

When establishing a site for a barbecue, be sure there is nothing hanging overhead and it is a safe distance from trees, buildings and other combustibles.

When using charcoal grills, use only the lighter fluids designated for use with charcoal grills when starting your fire. Never use gasoline to start your fire. Immediately after using the lighter fluid, replace the fluid container in its storage location. Do not set it down by the grill. Never use gasoline to quicken a charcoal fire. Don't add a charcoal starter fluid to the fire after it has begun. The flames can travel up to the can and cause an explosion. Always keep starter fluids in containers with child-resistant caps, and keep them out of the reach of children.

Don't wear loose clothing or robes around charcoal grills.

Flaming grease can ignite clothing. Keep a small spray can of water handy to douse flaming grease. A spray bottle filled with water, such as used for sprinkling clothes, is

excellent for this. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) when used to fire a home barbecue, is contained under pressure in a steel cylinder. The contents of an LPG cylinder, vaporized and in a confined area, have the explosive force of several sticks of dynamite. Therefore, the wise user of LPG will be aware of the dangers involved and the precautions that must be taken.

Read the manufacturer's instructions and be sure you thoroughly understand them. Do not transport LPG cylinders in the trunk of a passenger vehicle. A filled cylinder should always be transported in an upright position on the floor of a vehicle with all windows open. Remove the cylinder from the vehicle as soon as possible. Never leave a cylinder in a parked vehicle.

Using the proper size of wrench, make sure that all connections are tight. Remember that fittings on flammable gas cylinders have left-hand threads, requiring effort in a counterclockwise direction to tighten.

Make sure that grease is not allowed to drip on the hose or cylinders.

Never allow children to use a gas-fired barbecue.

Don't be tempted by a rainy day to use outdoor cooking equipment inside - not even in a garage or on a porch or balcony. Never use a gas-fired barbecue inside any structure.

If you are using a butane or propane barbecue, be sure there are no leaks from the tank or plumbing. If you suspect a leak, spray a soapy solution of water and dish-washing detergent over the tubing, hoses and fittings. If bubbling is found, turn off the supply at the tank and call a repairman.

When using these types of barbecues, be sure to light a match first and place it in the ignition hole before turning the gas valve on.

If you turn the gas valve on first, and then waste time looking for a match, flammable gas will build up inside the barbecue. When a lighted match is finally placed near the barbecue, an explosion may result.

When you are through cooking, turn the gas valve off to the barbecue and shut off the supply valve at the tank.

Never store any LPG cylinder - attached to the barbecue, or spares - inside any part of a structure, including porches and balconies. Store cylinders, including those attached to barbecues, outdoors in a shaded, cool area out of direct sunlight.

Power lawnmowers make the job much simpler than hand-propelled mowers. But, if not used with caution, these lawnmowers can be dangerous. If you own a gasoline-powered mower or gasoline-powered outdoor yard maintenance tools such as a chain saw, check the condition of the muffler at the beginning of the season. Spark arresters on mufflers should be considered in areas where dry grass is common. Hot gasses from defective mufflers often can ignite dry grass. Never refuel power tools when the engine is running and never refuel it inside a tool shed or a garage. Do so only outside, in well-ventilated areas.

Once the engine has been fueled, wipe up gasoline spills. And, since gasoline vapors

can travel along the ground and be ignited by a nearby flame, move at least 10 feet away from the fueling spot, and the vapors, before starting the motor. If you must refuel, cool the motor before doing so.

Never smoke when you use gasoline. Remember that the invisible fumes from the gasoline can seek out a spark or flame from as far as 50 feet away. Once the fumes meet the spark, you, your clothes and skin could be engulfed in flames. Keep away from cigarettes, water heater pilot lights and any flames if you're handling gasoline.

Store gasoline in a ventilated area in tightly closed cans away from children, sparks or flame source.

Boating enthusiasts look forward to getting their craft in the water. If you enjoy boating activities, remember that fire hazards exist on boats, too.

Don't smoke at fuel docks or during fueling procedures for your boat.

Make sure you have a Coast Guard-approved fire extinguisher on board your vessel. Know how to use it.

Always make sure that bilge fans are functioning to remove fuel fumes prior to starting the boat's engine. Those fumes could cause an explosion.

Don't refuel stoves or heating appliances in enclosed spaces.

Never cook when underway. A sudden lurch could cause grease to spill, causing a fire.

After painting and refurbishing operations, safely discard all oily and paint-filled rags. Never store these on board your boat. These rags can generate heat spontaneously and may self-ignite.