

The biggest disaster threat to American families isn't floods, hurricanes or tornadoes; it's fire. The American Red Cross responds to a disaster every eight minutes and nearly all of these are home fires.

The Nebraska/SW Iowa Region of the American Red Cross responded to 387 fires and helped nearly 1,600 homeowners who were devastated by flames last year. Fire is everyone's fight and the Red Cross urges people to know what steps they can take to help prevent fires.

"Home fires are a common and deadly threat because they happen so quickly," said Tina Labellarte, region CEO. "We urge everyone to become aware of what they should do to prevent a fire in their home."

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), there are almost 365,000 residential fires reported in the U.S. every year. These fires cause more than \$6 billion in property loss. While the frequency of fire deaths has steadily decreased over the past 10 years due to increased awareness and safety measures, more than 2,400 Americans still die every year in home fires.

Fortunately, most home fires can be prevented. Homeowners should check for items that can be hazardous such as candles and space heaters—common items that can turn dangerous very quickly.

To help avoid a fire in the home, there are steps someone can take now:

- Keep items that can catch on fire at least three feet away from anything that gets hot, such as sources of heat or stoves.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to sleep.

Smoke Alarms Save Lives

Install smoke alarms on every level of the home and outside each sleeping area. Put a smoke alarm inside every bedroom. Because smoke rises, put the alarms on the ceiling or high on the wall. Test the smoke alarms regularly. Install new batteries every year. Get new smoke alarms every 10 years.

Make a Plan

The Red Cross recommends that households develop a fire escape plan and practice it at least twice a year with everyone who lives in the home. People should know two ways to escape from every room and designate a safe place to meet outside the home in case of a fire.

Other safety steps include:

- Follow the escape plan in case of fire. Get out, stay out, and call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of the house and inside bedrooms.
- Replace batteries in smoke alarms at least once a year. Test each alarm monthly by pushing the test button.
- Download the Red Cross First Aid App to get access to life-saving information on what to do for common, everyday first aid emergencies including burns. The app is available in the Apple App Store and on Google Play for Android.

People can visit www.redcross.org for more steps they can take to lessen the chance of a fire in their home.

