

Fire Safety for Seniors



Americans over the age of 65 have a fire death rate nearly twice the national average. For those over 75, this jumps to three times the national average. Whether living independently or in a care facility, there are steps seniors can take to remain safe from a fire.

Be Kitchen Wise: Don't leave the kitchen while you are cooking. If you have to leave the kitchen to answer the doorbell or talk on the phone, set a timer or take a spoon to remind yourself that you are cooking. Don't wear loose fitting clothing; sleeves can catch on fire while reaching over the stove.

Give Space Heaters Space: Keep at least three feet between portable heaters and anything that can burn, including furniture, papers, blankets, pets and you.

Avoid Smoking Indoors: If you must smoke indoors, use large ashtrays. Never smoke while drowsy or in bed. It is very dangerous to fall asleep with a lit cigarette, cigar or pipe in your hands.

Plan Your Escape: It is a good idea to keep a pair of slippers, eyeglasses and flashlight by your bed at night. If you hear your smoke alarm at night you will be prepared to get out of your home quickly. Once you hear the sound of your smoke alarm every second counts for your escape. Make a plan that includes two safe ways out of every room to help you get out and away from the fire. Remember that fire grows very quickly. There is no time to gather belongings and pets are usually able to get out on their own.

Elevators: Elevators should never be used in a fire emergency. Everyone must use the stairwells to leave the building. If you are unable to use stairs, you should stay in an area of refuge. An apartment is a good example of an area of refuge. It has a door to keep the smoke out, a phone from which to call 9-1-1 for help and windows to signal from.

Smoke Alarms: Approximately 75 percent of the 1,300 senior citizens who die nation-wide in fires each year do not have working smoke alarms in their homes. Smoke alarms are designed to wake you up if a fire starts in your home at night. It is a dangerous risk to assume the smell of smoke or the heat of the fire will wake you up. Just a few breaths of the smoke will endanger your life and by the time the heat wakes you up your means of escape may be gone.

South King Fire & Rescue sponsors a smoke alarm installation program for senior and low-income homeowners in the City of Des Moines and Federal Way. Those who own their home and are either a senior citizen, living on a low income or disabled are eligible.

Call South King Fire & Rescue at **(253) 946-7337** for more information or visit our [Smoke Alarms page](#).