

Fires just don't happen - they are caused.

Fire is the third leading cause of accidental death in the United States. The leading cause of home fires is **heating equipment** that has been incorrectly installed, poorly maintained, or misused. This includes wood stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, **portable and space heaters, cooking appliances, and grills on decks, balconies, and porches.** Careless handling of **cigarettes** causes more fire deaths than any other cause. Unattended **candles** can also be deadly. Every year, almost 5,000 Americans die in home fires, which is 13 people each day. Thousands more are severely injured. Fires destroy property at a rate of \$7,400 a minute. However, fires can be easily prevented by taking certain precautions and keeping certain tips in mind.

Fire Safety In Your Apartment

Do NOT overload **electrical outlets**, and do NOT remove face plates from outlets or **switches**. Make sure to turn in a work order if an outlet or switch is malfunctioning. Avoid using **extension cords** whenever possible. All electrical cords should be visible and in the open - do NOT cover them with anything. Use a power strip with a surge protector if multiple outlets are needed – they protect your equipment and prevent electrical fires. **Portable heaters** are dangerous – use with extreme caution and NEVER leave them unattended or cover them with anything. NEVER use a heater in a bedroom while you sleep. **Halogen lamp bulbs** can reach extremely high temperatures and can start a fire if they come in contact with flammable or combustible materials (i.e. curtains, bedding, furniture, and carpet).

When cooking, NEVER leave your apartment for anything or any length of time without turning off the heat source. Many fires in apartments are caused when people leave stoves and cooking appliances unattended. Do NOT store things above a stove. Do not wear loose-fitting garments while cooking, as these can catch on fire. Always keep pot handles turned toward the center of the stove to avoid accidental spills and burns. NEVER pour water on a pan fire – smother a pan fire with a lid. Always keep a large lid ready in case a fire starts. NEVER use an outdoor barbecue grill in your apartment. When **grilling** outdoors, never leave the grill unattended. When you are done, pour water on coals before disposing of them. NEVER dispose of warm coals in a garbage can or dumpster, and never leave the hot grill or coals on a deck, balcony, or porch. Hot coals continue to produce carbon monoxide as well as heat.

NEVER obstruct or block any hallway, doors, or stairs in your apartment because these are your fire escapes. Store **flammable liquids** in tight metal containers and keep in a secure place away from heat sources and out of the way of children or animals. Keep **matches and lighters** out of reach of children, and store them away from flames and flammable substances. Keep **trash** away from heat, and never put **candles** near curtains, doorways, or flammable substances.

If you are a smoker, check for smoldering cigarettes before going to bed, and check any spot that could conceal hot smoking material.

Important Precautions

- ___ **Smoke detectors** save lives-- be sure they work.
- ___ **Fire extinguishers** are a basic precaution- know how to use them.
- ___ **Space heaters** are a safety hazard.
- ___ Use **electricity** safely.
- ___ Be careful when while **cooking.**
- ___ Be careful when **smoking.**
- ___ **Candles** are an open flame- be careful.
- ___ Never throw water on an **electrical or cooking fire.**

If There Is a Fire

- 1) Sound the alarm.** If there is no alarm in the building, warn the other occupants by knocking on the door and shouting as you leave.
- 2) Evacuate.** The most important part of escaping a fire is to get outside to safety. Once everyone is outside, stay outside – do not go back into the building for anything. Many people die trying to recover personal belongings from a burning or smoke-filled apartment. Try to rescue others **ONLY** if you can do so safely. If you cannot open the window to escape, break it after covering yourself with a blanket. Use nearby trees and bushes to climb down or throw pillows and cushions down to break your fall. If you are too high, wait by the open window with fresh air until help arrives.
- 3) Report. Call the fire department (911)** from a phone that is **away** from the fire. Call immediately and give the following information:

- ___ Your complete name
- ___ Complete address: street, city, and apartment number
- ___ Phone number you are calling from.
- ___ Stay on the phone until you are told to hang up

Stay away from the building and out of the way of the fire department. Do NOT go back into the building until the fire department says it is safe.

How to Survive a Fire

- 1) **If there is smoke,** crawl and stay low.
- 2) **Feel doors before opening** (if hot, do NOT open).
- 3) Go out the **nearest exit** or exit stairway.
- 4) **Get out of building.**

If You Are Trapped

- 1) Keep doors closed.
- 2) Signal for help.
- 3) Use a damp towel to help you breathe or open a window.

If Your Clothing Catches Fire STOP, DROP, and ROLL (Rolling smothers the fire)

What To Look For Before Renting an Apartment

- ___ **Smoke detectors.** Are they on every level of the building? Are they working?
- ___ **Two emergency exits to street.** A window counts as an exit for first and second floor apartments; a fire escape or two stairwells are needed for higher floors.
- ___ **Emergency exits that are clear** with doors that open outward and without a key.
- ___ **Exit signs and emergency lights** are recommended; they are required for multi-unit buildings.
- ___ A **fire extinguisher** near the kitchen in each apartment and available and identified on each floor's hallway in multi-unit buildings.
- ___ **Electrical** outlets, switches and fixtures in good condition, including in basement and laundry areas.
- ___ Is **wiring** exposed or are there problems with fixtures and appliances?

What to Ask The Landlord

Even though you are just renting the property and think you can leave everything to your landlord, you still have legal obligations as the tenant. Ask the following questions:

- ___ Has an **electrical** installation safety check been carried out recently? When and by?
- ___ Have **chimneys and flues** been cleaned recently? When and by whom?
- ___ Has an annual **visual check of sockets**, switches, and lamp holders been conducted?
- ___ Is there a **regular program of maintenance for all gas appliances**, including heaters?
- ___ Has the **house been registered or licensed as a multiple occupancy**, if applicable, with the local authority?
- ___ Is the **building regularly inspected by the local fire department** or city?
- ___ Has there **ever been a fire in the building**?
- ___ Is the owner a member in good standing in a **landlord/tenant association**?
- ___ Has the city or university ever received **safety complaints** regarding this housing?

Tenant Fire Safety Checklist

- ___ Have you prepared an **escape route** from each room in the house?
- ___ Memorize an **escape plan** (two ways out of the home with your eyes shut)
- ___ Have **windows** easy-to-open for escape
- ___ Always do a **before bed “check”** – make sure all electrical appliances are off, all cigarettes and candles are extinguished, stove, cooking appliances, and heaters are off, and all internal doors are closed.
- ___ **Smoke detectors**: Test monthly; replace batteries each semester.
- ___ Are there **fire extinguishers** near kitchen and all exits? Are they in easily accessible places? Are they properly pressurized? Know how to test and operate them.
- ___ Are any burning or **heated appliances** ever left unattended?
- ___ **Cooking** operations always attended.
- ___ NO cooking appliances in bedrooms
- ___ **Electrical** outlets NEVER overloaded, and cords NOT running underneath anything.
- ___ Electrical outlets in good condition.
- ___ **Candles** properly contained and watched.
- ___ All **cigarettes** properly put out.
- ___ All **flammable liquids** and combustibles kept away from open flames and heaters.
- ___ Choose flame-retardant items if possible

Renter's Insurance

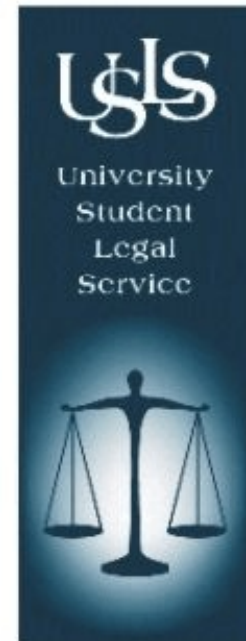
Many people consider purchasing renter's insurance to cover the costs associated with replacing property in the apartment or of someone being injured in the apartment. Some landlords require renter's insurance. Be sure to discuss in detail with an insurance agent what items are covered and what events they are covered under – theft, fire, accident, water leaks, etc. Most major insurers provide renter's insurance. Once you have coverage, use a camcorder to record your property and document everything. Save receipts for items that are insured to simplify the claims process. Keep them in a fire-proof or off-site location.

PLEASE NOTE: The materials contained in this pamphlet have been prepared for information and educational purposes only. Communication of information through this pamphlet does not create or constitute an attorney-client relationship, is not intended to solicit clients or to provide legal services as to any particular matter and is not intended to convey or constitute legal advice or provide a substitute for obtaining legal advice from a qualified attorney. It is important for you to consult with an attorney regarding your rights and responsibilities in a particular situation.

This publication is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact USLS, 160 West Bank Skyway, 219 19th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 624-1001, usls@tc.umn.edu, www.umn.edu/usls

What Students Need to Know About Fire Safety

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



University Student Legal Service

160 West Bank Skyway
 219 19th Avenue South
 Minneapolis, MN 55455
 Phone: (612) 624-1001
 Fax: (612) 624-7351
www.umn.edu/usls