Consumer Product Safety Commission

Safety for Older Consumers – Home Safety Checklist

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
Office of Information and Public Affairs
4330 East West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814
info@cpsc.gov
www.cpsc.gov

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Many older Americans are injured in and around their homes every year. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that on average 1.4 million people aged 65 and older are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year for injuries associated with consumer products. Within this age group, the rate of injury is the highest for people 75 years of age and older.

Falls in and around the home are a top cause of injuries to older adults. Older adults also are at greater risk than others of dying in a house fire. Many of these and other injuries result from hazards that are easy to overlook, but also easy to fix. By spotting these hazards and taking simple steps to correct them, you can prevent injuries to yourself or visitors to your home.

Use this checklist to prepare for an emergency and to spot possible safety problems in your home.

Top Ten Safety Checklist for Older Consumers

- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms throughout your home.
- Have an emergency escape plan and pre-arrange for a family member or caregiver to help you escape, if needed.
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy in the kitchen in case of fire.
- Make sure there is good lighting inside and outside your home to help prevent falls.
- Make sure walking surfaces are flat, slip resistant, free of objects, and in good condition to avoid falls.
- Keep ashtrays, smoking materials, candles, hot plates, and other potential fire sources away from curtains, furniture, beds and bedding.
- Have fuel burning appliances including furnaces and chimneys inspected by a professional every year to make sure they are working properly and not leaking poisonous carbon monoxide.
- Install ground fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs, in potentially damp locations such as the kitchen, bathroom, garage, near utility tubs or sinks, and on the exterior of the house to protect against electrocution.
- Make sure all medications are stored in child-resistant enclosures and are clearly marked to prevent children from accessing the medication and being poisoned.
- Set your hot water heater to no more than 120° F to help prevent burns.

Prepare for an Emergency

- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms throughout your home.
- Have an emergency escape plan and pre-arrange for a family member or caregiver to help you escape the home in a fire, if needed.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms

☐ **Smoke alarms are installed on every level of my home, outside sleeping areas and inside bedrooms. Carbon monoxide (CO) alarms are installed on every level of my home and outside sleeping areas.**

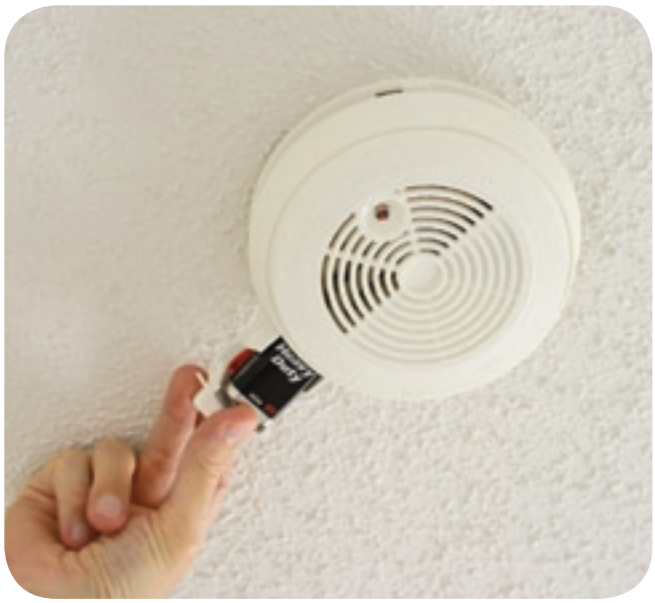
Smoke alarms are critical for the early detection of a fire and could mean the difference between life and death. About two-thirds of home fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms.

All homes should also have carbon monoxide (CO) alarms installed. CO is an invisible and odorless gas that can kill you in minutes. Any fuel-burning appliance in your home is a potential CO source, but even all-electric homes could have sources of CO such as a car running in an attached garage or a portable generator operating outside. CO alarms should not be installed in basements, attics, or garages unless they contain sleeping areas.

☐ **I have tested my smoke and CO alarms within the last month, and they are working properly.**

Alarms that use voice warnings may help you to distinguish smoke alarms from CO alarms. If you are hearing-impaired and are unable to hear the sound from a smoke or CO alarm, install alarms with strobe lights to notify you during the day and use an assistive device that vibrates the bed and pillow to awaken you when the alarms sound at night.

☐ **I have replaced the batteries in all of my alarms within the last year.**



Emergency Escape Plan

☐ **I have an emergency escape plan.**

Once a fire starts, it spreads rapidly. An escape plan can reduce the amount of time required for you and your family to get out safely, and can improve your chances of surviving a fire or similar emergency. To the extent possible, identify two ways to escape from every room and avoid escape routes that require the use of escape ladders or similar items that could put you at risk of a fall. If there is a fire in your home, do not waste time trying to save property. Get out as fast as possible, and remember: **ONCE OUT – STAY OUT!**

☐ **I have practiced my fire escape plan with my family within the last 6 months, during both the day and night.**

Emergency Contact Information

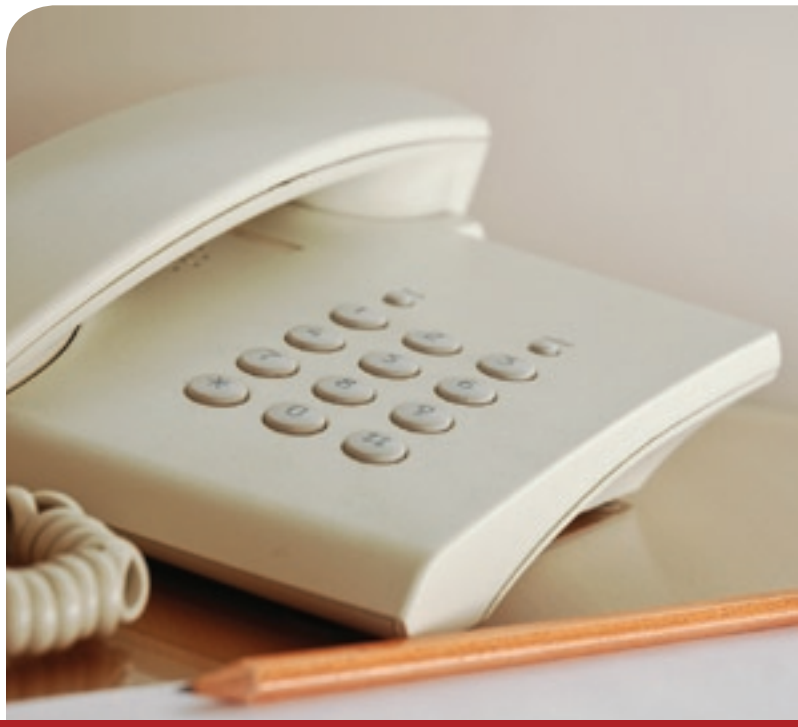
☐ **Emergency numbers are posted on or near all telephones.**

Make certain that telephone numbers are readily available for the Police, Fire Department, and local Poison Control Center, along with numbers for your doctor(s) and a trusted neighbor or family member. If you have impaired vision or difficulty seeing the numbers on a regular telephone, choose a phone that has large, lighted number keys.

☐ **Telephones are positioned low enough so I can reach them if I have an accident that leaves me unable to stand.**

Keeping telephones at a low height is helpful in the event that you have an accident that leaves you unable to stand. As an alternative, consider obtaining a wearable medical alert device that provides a "Call for Help" pushbutton.

☐ **A telephone is located in my bedroom in case a fire traps me there.**



Check Throughout the Home

- Make sure walking surfaces are flat, slip resistant, free of objects, and in good condition to avoid falls.
- Install ground fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs, in potentially damp locations such as the kitchen, bathroom, garage, near utility tubs or sinks, and on the exterior of the house to protect against electrocution.

Walking Surfaces

- [ ] **All walking surfaces are free of electrical cords, boxes, furniture, appliances, and other objects that could pose a tripping hazard, especially in the event of an emergency or fire.**

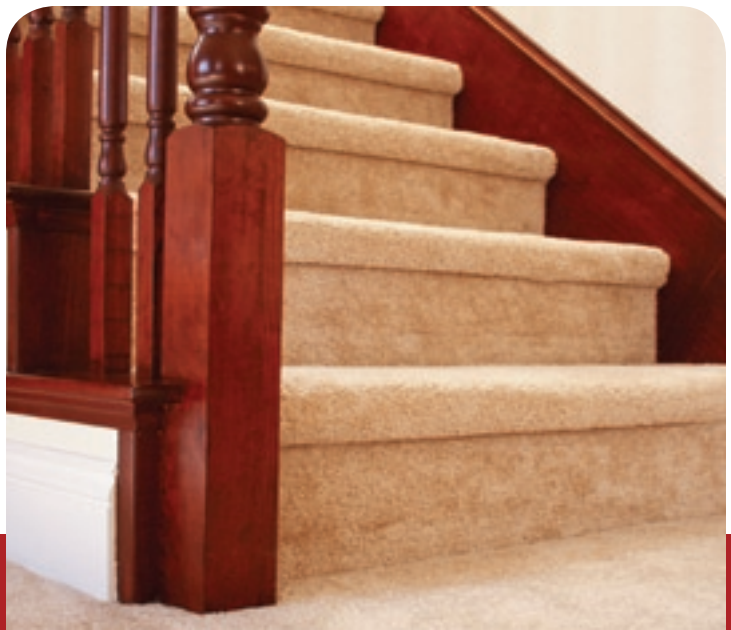
  Falls are associated with more than half of all product-related visits to the emergency room among adults aged 65 to 74, and with more than three-quarters of visits among adults 75 years and older. Tripping over loose carpets, cords, or other obstacles on the floor is a common fall scenario.

- [ ] **All flooring is in good condition, is flat and uniform, and is slip-resistant or is covered with slip-resistant carpeting, rugs, mats, or similar materials.**

  Slip-resistant surfaces are especially important in potentially wet locations such as bathrooms, kitchens, and entryways. There should be no loose floorboards, missing tiles, or similar problems that could pose a tripping hazard. Carpeting should be low pile and free of tears, holes, or wear that could cause slips or trips.

Steps and Stairways

- [ ] **All steps are in good condition, have flat, even surfaces and are free of objects that could pose a tripping hazard.**
- [ ] **All stair treads are in good condition, and have slip-resistant surfaces such as dense, low-pile carpeting or slip-resistant strips that are securely attached to the steps.**



- [ ] **Light switches are located at both the top and bottom of the stairs.**

  If no other light is available, keep an operating flashlight in a convenient location.

- [ ] **All stairs have solidly mounted handrails that run continuously along the full length of the stairs on both sides. Handrails are easily graspable.**

Lighting

- [ ] **Walkways and rooms in which I am likely to be reading—for example, the bedroom, bathrooms, and the kitchen—are especially well-lit or have additional lighting available.**

  Lighting is an important factor in preventing falls since areas that are poorly lit or in shadow can hide slipping and tripping hazards. Indirect lighting or frosted bulbs can be used to reduce glare.

- [ ] **All light bulbs are of the appropriate wattage and type for the lamp or light fixture in which they are installed.**

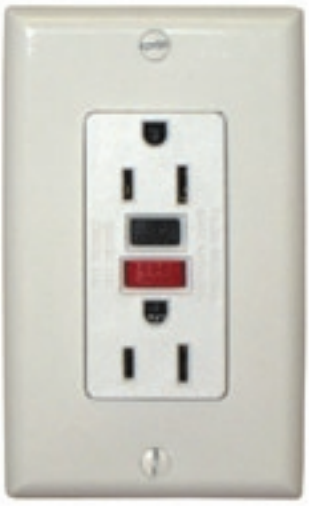
  For those fixtures that do not identify the correct wattage, installed bulbs should not exceed 60 watts, or 25 watts for bulbs with a miniature base (candelabra). Consider using compact-fluorescent or similar energy-efficient bulbs, which produce more light per watt than incandescent bulbs.

Electrical Outlets and Switches

- [ ] **All electrical outlets that are located in potentially damp locations, such as the kitchen, bathroom, garage, near the utility tub or sink, and on the exterior of the house, have ground-fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs, installed to protect against electrical shock.**

- [ ] **I have tested all GFCI receptacles within the last month and have found them to be working properly.**

  GFCI receptacles can provide power even when they are no longer providing shock protection. Test a GFCI receptacle monthly by plugging a night-light or lamp into the receptacle and switching it on. When you press the TEST button on the GFCI receptacle, the RESET button should pop forward and the light should go out. Pressing the RESET button should restore power to the outlet.



- [ ] **No electrical outlets or switches are unusually warm or hot to the touch.**

  Hot or unusually warm electrical outlets or switches may indicate an unsafe wiring condition. Stop using these electrical outlets and have an electrician check them as soon as possible.

- [ ] **All electrical outlets and switches have cover plates installed so no wiring is exposed.**

- [ ] **Unused receptacles have safety covers installed to prevent access by young children.**

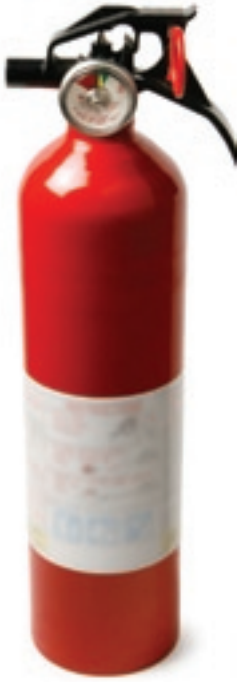
Electrical Cords

- ☐ **All electrical, extension, and telephone cords are out of the flow of foot traffic since they pose a tripping hazard.**
- ☐ **Electrical cords are not beneath furniture, rugs, or carpeting. Cords are not pinched against the wall by furniture and are not wrapped tightly around objects.**
- ☐ **All electrical cords are in good condition and are free of damage such as fraying, cracking, and staple or nail holes.**
- ☐ **Extension cords are not overloaded. In other words, the total wattage of all appliances plugged into an extension cord does not exceed the rated capacity of the extension cord.**

  If the cord rating is exceeded, switch to a higher-rated cord or unplug some of the appliances. Standard 16-gauge extension cords can carry 1625 watts. Discard older extension cords that use small 18 gauge wires.
- ☐ **All extension cords have polarized-plug receptacles; that is, receptacles with one wide plug slot and one narrow plug slot.**

Check Kitchens

Keep a fire extinguisher handy in the kitchen in case of fire.



- **A fire extinguisher is in the kitchen in case of fire.**
- **Towels, curtains, potholders, and other objects that might catch fire are located away from the range.**
- **Kitchen ventilation systems or range exhausts are functioning properly.**

  Indoor air pollutants and CO may accumulate to unhealthy levels in a kitchen with gas or kerosene-fired appliances. Use ventilation systems or open windows to clear the air of vapors and smoke. Never use your range or stove to heat your home.
- **Electrical appliance and extension cords are away from the sink and other water sources and are away from hot surfaces such as the range.**
- **Electrical receptacles that supply countertop appliances, such as coffeemakers and toasters, are protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs.**

  Test all GFCI receptacles monthly to make sure they are working properly.
- **Kitchen lighting is bright and even, especially near the stove, sink and countertop work areas.**
- **A stable step stool with a handrail is easily accessible for reaching high items.**

  Standing on chairs, boxes, or other makeshift items to reach high shelves can result in falls. Buy a step stool if you don't have one. Choose a sturdy one with a handrail that you can grasp while standing on the top step. Before climbing on any step stool, make sure it is fully opened and stable on a flat surface. Discard step stools that are not stable or have broken parts.

Check Living Rooms and Family Rooms

Have fuel burning appliances, including furnaces and chimneys, inspected by a professional every year to make sure they are working properly and not leaking poisonous carbon monoxide.

- ☐ **All chimneys have been professionally inspected and cleaned within the last year, and chimney openings are clear of leaves and other debris that could clog them.**

  A clogged chimney can cause poisonous carbon monoxide (CO) to enter your home. Burning wood in a fireplace can cause creosote, a highly flammable substance, to build-up inside the chimney. This material can ignite and result in a serious chimney fire.

- ☐ **All portable space heaters and wood-burning heating equipment are at least 3 feet from walls, furniture, curtains, rugs, newspapers, and other flammable or combustible materials.**

- ☐ **All portable space heaters are stable and located away from walkways.**

- ☐ **The surface of each fireplace is fireproof, and all wood-burning heating equipment is installed on fireproof flooring or on an approved non-combustible floor protector.**

  Burning material can be ejected from an open fireplace. Fire resistant hearthrugs, made of wool, fiberglass, or other synthetics, are readily available to protect the area in front of a fireplace.

- ☐ **Candles, smoking materials, and other potential fire sources are located away from curtains, furniture, and other flammable or combustible objects and are never left out unattended.**

Check Bathrooms

Make sure all medications are stored in child-resistant enclosures and are clearly marked to prevent children from accessing the medications and being poisoned.

- [ ] **All medications are stored in child-resistant enclosures and are clearly marked.**

  If grandchildren or other youngsters are visitors, purchase medicines in containers with child-resistant caps, and close the caps properly after each use. Store all medicines out of the reach of children. Many poisonings occur when children visiting grandparents go through the medicine cabinet or their grandmother's purse. Only request non-child-resistant enclosures if you are physically unable to use child-resistant enclosures. Medications that are not clearly and accurately labeled can be easily mixed up, causing you to take the wrong medicine or to miss a required dosage of medicine. Be sure that all containers are clearly marked with the contents, doctor's instructions, expiration date, and patient's name. Dispose of outdated medicines properly. Because of their environmental impact, disposing expired medication in the toilet may not be an acceptable method. Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you on the best method of disposal.

- [ ] **All bathtubs and showers are equipped with non-skid mats, abrasive strips, or surfaces that are not slippery and have at least one secure and easily graspable grab bar.**

- [ ] **The bathroom floor is slip-resistant or is covered with secure slip-resistant materials.**

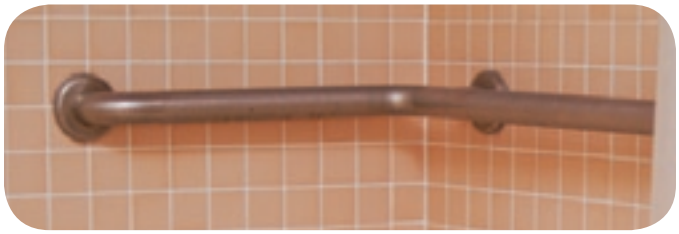
- [ ] **All hair dryers, shavers, curling irons, and other small electrical appliances not currently in use are unplugged.**

- [ ] **All small electrical appliances are away from sinks, tubs, and other sources of water.**

  Never reach into water to retrieve a fallen appliance without being sure that the appliance is unplugged.

- [ ] **Electrical receptacles in the bathroom are protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs.**

  Test all GFCI receptacles monthly to make sure they are working properly.



Check Bedrooms

Keep ashtrays, smoking materials, candles, hot plates, and other potential fire sources away from curtains, furniture, beds and bedding.

- ☐ **Ash trays, smoking materials, candles, hot plates, and other potential fire sources are located away from curtains, furniture, beds, and bedding.**

  Burns associated with personal use products were the most frequently reported cause of accidental death among seniors. Smoking is one of the major contributors to this problem. Never smoke in bed. Remove sources of heat or flame from areas around beds, and do not leave the room or fall asleep while a candle is burning.

- ☐ **A flashlight is within reach of the bed in case of a power outage.**

- ☐ **A telephone is within reach of the bed in case of an emergency.**

- ☐ **My mattress meets the new federal flammability standard.**

  Newer mattresses are more resistant to fires from open flames such as candles, lighters, and matches, and have tags indicating that they meet the federal standard.

- ☐ **Electrically-heated blankets are not folded, covered by other objects, or "tucked in," when in use. The power cord is not pinched or crushed by the bed, between a wall or the floor.**

  Objects that cover the blanket's heating elements or controls can cause overheating. Do not allow anything, including other blankets, comforters, and even sleeping pets, on top of the electric blanket while it is in use. "Tucking in" electric blankets also can cause excessive heat buildup and start a fire. The edges of your electric blanket should hang freely over the sides and end of the bed. Always turn off your heating pad before you go to sleep. It can cause serious burns even at relatively low settings.

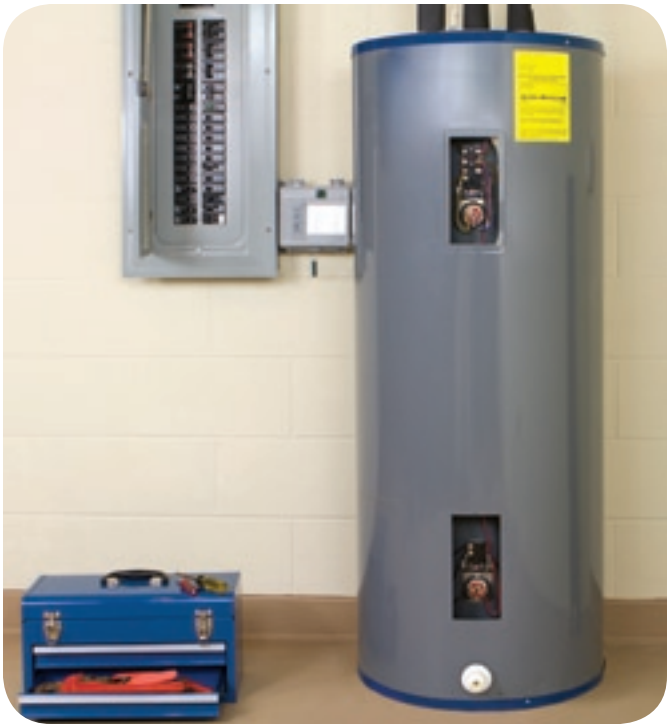
- ☐ **As recommended by the fire safety community, smoke alarms are placed inside and just outside bedrooms and they have been tested within the last month and are working. CO alarms are located outside sleeping areas, have been tested within the last month, and are working properly. The batteries have been replaced within the last year.**

Check Basements, Garages, Workshops, and Storage Areas

Set your hot water heater to no more than 120 degrees fahrenheit to help prevent burns.

- [ ] **The water heater is set to no more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.**

  Water above 120 degrees can burn your skin. Lower the setting to 120 degrees or "low." If you are unfamiliar with the setting, ask a qualified person to adjust it for you; if your hot water system is controlled by the landlord, ask the landlord to consider lowering the temperature.



- [ ] **Work areas, especially those where power tools are used, are well-lit.**

  Basements, garages, and storage areas can contain many tripping hazards. Sharp or pointed tools can make a fall even more hazardous. Power tools and workshop equipment have been associated with many emergency room-treated injuries to people 65 and older.

- [ ] **For electrical panels with fuses, the fuses are the correct size (amperage) for the circuit.**

  If you do not know the correct electrical rating, have an electrician label the fuse box with the sizes you should use or replace the fuse panel with a circuit breaker panel. Fuses rated 15 and 20 amperes are typical in homes. If you find that all or most of the fuses in your fuse box are rated higher than 20 amperes, there is a good chance that some of the fuses are rated too high for residential circuits and can present a serious fire hazard.

- [ ] **All power tools are either equipped with a 3-prong plug or marked to show that they are double-insulated. All space heaters with 3-prong plugs are plugged into 3-hole receptacles or are connected with a properly attached and certified adapter.**

  Three-prong plugs and double insulation reduce the risk of an electric shock. Consider replacing old tools that lack a

3-prong plug and are not double-insulated. Improperly grounded tools and appliances can lead to electrical shock. Never defeat the grounding feature by removing the round grounding prong on the plug. Check with your service person or an electrician if you are in doubt.

- [ ] **Electrical receptacles in garages, unfinished basements, and workshops are protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs.**

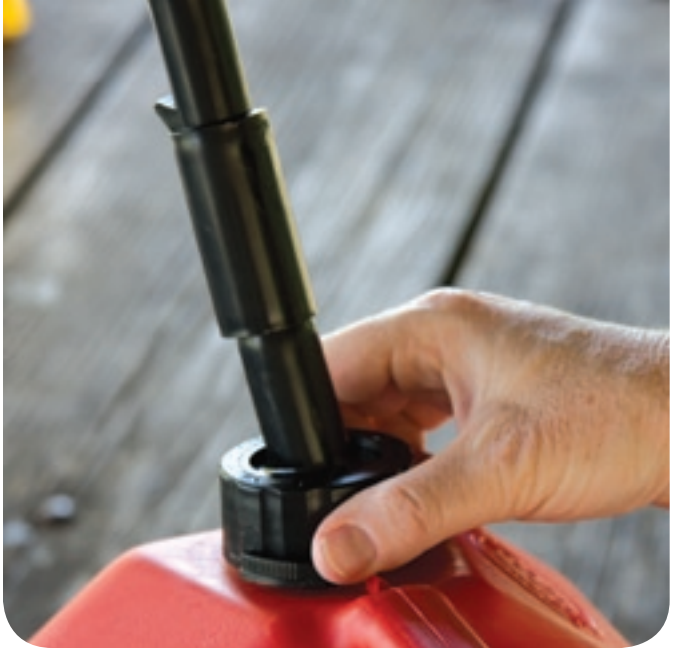
  Test all GFCIs monthly to make sure they are working properly.

- [ ] **All fuel-burning appliances, including furnaces, boilers, fireplaces, wood stoves, and water heaters, as well as chimneys, flues, and vents have been inspected professionally within the last year.**

  A heater operating without proper ventilation and air supply produces carbon monoxide (CO), and older consumers may be more susceptible to CO exposure. CO is an invisible killer. It's a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas. The first line of defense against CO poisoning is to have a qualified professional inspect all fuel-burning heating systems, including furnaces, boilers, fireplaces, wood stoves, water heaters, chimneys, flues and vents.

- [ ] **All kerosene, natural gas, and similar space-heating equipment has adequate ventilation.**

  Always use the correct fuel, as recommended by the manufacturer. Never pour gasoline into a kerosene heater. Review the installation and operating instructions. Call the manufacturer or your local fire department if you have additional questions.



- [ ] **No containers of flammable and combustible liquids are stored inside the house.**

  The vapors that can escape from damaged or loosely closed containers of flammable or combustible liquids may be toxic when inhaled and may cause fires. Do not store gasoline or other highly flammable liquids in the house, utility room, garage or near the water heater. Portable gasoline containers intended for use by consumers are required to have child-resistant closures effective January 2009.

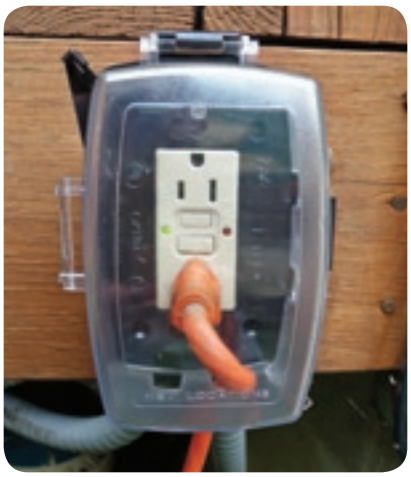
- [ ] **Portable generators are not operating in the basement, garage, or anywhere near the house.**

  People have been killed by operating a portable generator in their basement or garage. Generators quickly produce high levels of poisonous CO and should never be used indoors, including inside a home, basement, shed, or garage, even if doors or windows are open. CO from a generator used indoors can kill you and your family in minutes. Consumers should use portable generators outside only and far from windows, doors, and vents to their homes.

Check Entryways and the Home Exterior

Make sure there is good lighting inside and outside your home to help prevent falls.

- ☐ The porch, entryway, and approach to the entryway are all well-illuminated.
- ☐ The light switch is located near the entryway.
- ☐ Outside steps, entryways, and approaches to the entryway are in good condition and are slip-resistant.
- ☐ Outside steps have handrails that are easily graspable.
- ☐ All outside electrical outlets are GFCI-protected and in weatherproof covers or enclosures.
- ☐ Portable generators are located far from windows, doors, and vents to the home.
- ☐ All outdoor electrical tools and equipment have 3-prong cords and have not been modified to plug into 2-prong outlets.



REMEMBER TO RE-CHECK YOUR HOME PERIODICALLY.

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