



**State of West Virginia
Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety**

Sterling Lewis, Jr.
State Fire Marshal

Earl Ray Tomblin, Governor

Phone: (304) 558-2191
Fax: (304) 558-2537

STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

1207 Quarrier St, 2nd Floor
Charleston, WV 25301

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Contact person:

Carol Nolte

WV State Fire Marshal's Office

Phone: (304) 558-2191, Ext. 53223

E-Mail: Carol.E.Nolte@wv.gov

***Federal Partnership Promotes
Fire Safety Awareness for Families***

Because of their lack of experience, young children are at double the risk of dying in a fire as compared to the rest of the population. And with home fires increasing each year between November and April, young children are at high risk of being seriously injured or dying in residential fires.

The West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office is working to promote awareness of these dangers in our state and asking families to be vigilant about preventing home fires in the first place. "The single most effective thing adults can do to keep children safe is to look around their homes, identify potential fire hazards—and remove them," advises Sterling Lewis, Jr., State Fire Marshal.

And that's also why the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Commission on Children and Disasters have announced a new public awareness campaign to help keep children and families safer from the tragedy of home fires.

FEMA recently released a new report on the risks fires pose to children, who are typically one of the groups at highest risk of dying in fires. "The bottom line is that one of the greatest risks our youngest kids may face during the winter months exists in their homes," says FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate.

Heating and cooking are two of the leading fire risks to children during the cold months, even going into early spring. Some tips to keep in mind:

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- Give space heaters space! Keep a 3-foot safety (“child-free”) zone around any heat sources in your home, and keep children and pets well away.
- Do not use your oven to heat your home—it’s not designed to be used as a heat source except for food items.
- Follow all manufacturers’ directions for alternate heat sources such as wood stoves and kerosene heaters.
- Store all fuels in proper containers and keep them away from children and combustible materials.
- Young children are at high risk of being burned by hot food and liquids. Keep children away from the stove and microwave, and never hold a child while cooking or carrying hot foods and liquids.
- Teach children about hot things that can hurt them. When they are old enough, teach them to cook safely. Supervise them very closely.

Be Prepared!

- Make an escape plan with your family and agree on a safe meeting place outside. Practice your home fire drill regularly so everyone knows what to do.
- Install and maintain smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on each level of your home, especially in sleeping areas. **In West Virginia last year, no smoke alarms were present in 30% of fires that occurred in residences.**
- Test your smoke alarms every month and change batteries at least once a year.
- If there’s a fire in your home, ONLY call 911 once everyone is safely outside.
- If you’re renovating or building a new home, keep in mind that residential fire sprinklers are your best line of defense. Unlike smoke alarms (which although valuable, can only notify you of fire), sprinklers can actually save lives AND property, generally suppressing the fire with only one sprinkler head.
- A good website for children and families can be found at www.usfa.fema.gov, and also information on the FEMA *Fire Safety Awareness for Families* campaign. Click on “USFA Kids” for resources for parents and children, interactive fire safety puzzles, coloring pages and more.
- For more information on residential fire sprinklers, visit www.homefiresprinkler.org.

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