

Focus on Fire Safety: Appliance Fires

Most homes have a multitude of electrical appliances ranging from small kitchen items such as toasters and microwaves to major appliances like clothes dryers and dishwashers. While appliances make our lives much easier, they also pose significant risks—including fire—if not maintained properly.

Appliance fire safety is a matter of keeping your appliances in good working order, as well as using them as they were intended. The average homeowner has several thousand dollars invested in appliances. To protect your investment and to avoid the potential risk of fire, find out what to check for to ensure your appliances don't put you or your family at risk.

By the Numbers: Residential Appliance Fires

Residential appliance fires annually result in an estimated:

- **9,600** fires
- **25** deaths
- **525** injuries
- **\$211** million in property loss

Source: National Fire Incident Reporting System

Stop an Appliance Fire Before It Starts!

- Immediately fix appliances or lamps that sputter or spark.
- Keep appliances away from wet areas, especially in the kitchen, bathroom, basement, and garage.
- If an appliance has a three-prong plug, never force it into a two-prong outlet or extension cord.
- Use extension cords wisely and don't overload them.
- Regularly check your extension cords to make sure the plastic is not worn away or coming apart at the ends.
- Never use an extension cord as permanent wiring.
- Instead of a simple extension cord, get a laboratory-tested extension cord with built-in circuit breakers.
- Check your wiring on a regular basis. Look for outlets that don't work, light switches that are hot to the touch, and lights that flicker. This could mean something is wrong and should be checked by an electrician.
- Keep clothes, curtains, and other potentially combustible items at least three feet from all heaters.



Never force a three-prong cord into a two-slot outlet.

Clothes Dryer Fire Safety Tips

- Have your dryer installed and serviced by a professional.
- Do not operate the dryer without a lint filter. Clean the lint filter before or after each use. Remove accumulated lint around the drum.
- Rigid or flexible metal venting materials should be used to sustain proper air flow and drying time.
- Make sure the air exhaust bent pipe is not restricted and the outdoor vent flap will open when the dryer is operating.
- Once a year, or more often if you notice that it is taking longer than normal for your clothes to dry, clean lint out of the vent pipe or have a dryer lint removal service do it for you.
- Keep dryers in good working order. Gas dryers should be inspected by a professional to ensure that the gas line and connection are intact and free of leaks.
- Make sure the right plug and outlet are used and that the machine is connected properly.
- Do not leave a dryer running if you leave home or when you go to bed.
- Never dry items that have come in contact with flammable substances, such as cooking oil, gasoline, paint thinner, or alcohol.
- Keep the dryer area clear of things that can burn, such as boxes or clothing.



Clean the lint filter before or after each use.

Washer Fire Safety Tips

- Avoid overloading a washing machine.
- Washing machines should be properly grounded.
- Make sure the right plug and outlet are used and that the machine is connected properly.

Extension Cords

When it comes to appliance safety, one of the most commonly used and misused items is the extension cord. Extension cords pose several risks:

- Connections may not be secure.
- Power fluctuations may damage the appliance.
- Poor connections can cause sparks that may start a fire.



Don't overload extension cords or wall sockets.

To reduce the risk of fire from extension cords:

- Use electrical extension cords wisely and don't overload them.
- Consider having additional circuits or outlets added by a qualified electrician so you do not have to use extension cords.

- Replace or repair loose or frayed cords.
- Avoid running extension cords across doorways or under carpets.

Oven Ranges

The most common household accidents happen when operating the family oven or range. To reduce this risk:

- Keep burners, the stove top, and oven clean and free of grease and other flammable debris.
- Never leave flammable items such as hot pads or towels near burners.
- Don't leave food cooking unattended.
- Never spray aerosols near a flame.
- Always turn pot handles inward to avoid the possibility of knocking a pot off the stove.
- Never wear clothing with long, loose sleeves while cooking.
- Periodically inspect electrical cords and gas connections for wear and damage.

Microwave Ovens

- Never operate a unit with a door that is bent, warped, or otherwise damaged in a way that prevents it from closing firmly.
- Don't stand directly in front of the microwave while it is operating.
- Avoid overheating liquids; they may super-heat and erupt, causing severe burns.
- Never operate an empty oven.
- Keep the inside of the oven, the door, and all seals clean and free of debris.
- Never use metal pans and utensils in the unit as arcing will occur.
- Periodically check for microwave leakage with an FDA-approved testing device.

Electrical System Safety

- If your power goes out a lot or the lights in your home flicker, smell bad, or make noise, have an electrician come to inspect your wiring.
- The electrical outlet in the bathroom should have a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI). This is a tool that protects you from a dangerous shock when water and electricity come together. An electrician can install a GFCI for you.
- All electrical outlets and switches should be covered by "face plates."
- Inspect electrical cords to make sure they are in good condition.
- Don't tie or knot cords.
- Don't let furniture sit on cords.



Replace worn, old, or damaged appliance cords right