

# August Safety Theme: Fire Safety Hazards Increase With Age



The S.C. Fire Marshal wants you to be aware that several factors put senior citizens at a high risk of dying in a fire.

## Those factors include:

- Older adults are the fastest growing age group of the American population.
- Older fire victims tend to be in close contact with the source of the fire that kills them, according to National Fire Incident Reporting System data. Oftentimes, victims are injured or killed when their clothing, bedding or upholstery ignite.

- Older adults may have decreased mobility and other health issues that would prohibit a quick response during a fire emergency.
- Many older adults take multiple medications that could lead to a slower response or confusion, altering the decision-making process.
- The impairments caused by the combination of alcohol and prescription drugs in older adults can further impede judgment and escape. Such impairments may also lead to an increased likelihood of accidentally starting a fire and not detecting a fire in its early stages.

“Often, help from a family member, caregiver or neighbor may be required to assist an older adult in safely exiting the home,” said South Carolina State Fire Marshal John Reich. “Addressing these issues before the fire occurs is essential.”

When developing a fire safety plan for older adults, Reich recommends following advice from the United States Fire Administration.

## Install and Maintain Smoke Alarms

- Make sure smoke alarms are installed in each bedroom and outside all sleeping areas. Test them monthly and replace the batteries at least once a year. Caregivers are encouraged to check the smoke alarms of those who are unable to do it themselves. The chances of surviving a home fire almost doubles with the initial warning from a smoke alarm.

## Plan Your Escape

- Planning fire escape plans around one’s capabilities is a key element to fire safety! Know at least two exits from every room. If a walker or wheelchair is used, all exits needs to be checked to make sure the devices can get through the doorways. Make any necessary accommodations, such as providing exit ramps and widening doorways to facilitate an emergency escape. Unless instructed by the fire department, never use an elevator during a fire.

## Don’t Isolate Yourself

- Speak to your family members, building manager or neighbors about your fire safety plan and practice it with them. Contact your local fire department’s non-emergency line and explain your special needs. The fire department will probably suggest escape plan ideas and may perform a home fire safety inspection and offer suggestions about smoke alarm placement and maintenance. Ask emergency providers to keep your special needs information on file.

## Live Near an Exit

- Although you have the legal right to live where you choose, you’ll be safest on the ground floor if you live in an apartment building. If you live in a multi-story home, arrange to sleep on the ground floor and near an exit.

## Be Fire-Safe Around the Home

- The leading cause of residential fire deaths among older adults is careless smoking. If you must smoke, never smoke in bed or near an oxygen source, gas stove or other flammable object.

- When cooking, never approach an open flame while wearing loose clothing, and don't leave cooking unattended. Use a timer to remind you of food in the oven.
- Don't overload electrical outlets or extension cords.
- Never use the oven to heat your home. Properly maintain chimneys and space heaters.
- Take special precautions if you are on medication that makes you drowsy.

“Fire Safety is everyone’s responsibility,” Reich said. “Taking advantage of modern technology by installing a residential sprinkler system is an option worth exploring, especially for people with mobility issues.”

For more information, [Fire Safety for Older Americans](#) safety information section.