The risk of dying from fire increases substantially among older adults. This document contains a collection of fire safety information for elderly people. Information includes procedures to follow in case of fire and early warning technologies such as smoke alarms. The booklet describes potential sources of fires (smoking, home heating, kitchens, electrical hazards, home appliances, barbecue grills) and how the elderly person can reduce the risks of fires. Also presented are tips on developing a home fire-safety plan. (JE)
Fire Safety for Retired Adults
Participant's Coursebook

For the National Fire Safety Certification System for the Elderly
Fire Safety
for Retired Adults
and Their Families

Bonnie L. Walker, Ph.D.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover design by Gene Hansen, Creative Services, Inc.

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This project was prepared pursuant to the National Institute on Aging, Grant Number 1 R43AG08903-01A2. The statements and conclusions herein are those of Bonnie Walker & Associates, Inc. and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the sponsoring agency.
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The long range goals of the National Fire Safety Certification System is to provide uniform, validated fire safety training to older Americans living independently in their homes and to reduce their high risk of fire death.

Funding for the development of the system came from the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Aging, through a Small Business Innovation Research Grant award.

Guiding the project is a Focus Group made up of experts in the fields of fire safety, developmental disabilities, gerontology, training, and instructional design.

The complete system consists of four components:
- Twenty minute video,
- Twenty-four page booklet,
- Leader's guide, and
- Evaluation materials.

The Fire Safety Workshop for Retired Adults video, titled *The Need for Fire Safety*, covers topics of importance to older people living independently in the community or with family members.

The Fire Safety Workshop for Retired Adults was pilot tested in February 1991 at the Bowie Senior Center and the Belair Community Center in Bowie, Maryland.
THE RISK OF FIRE IS ALWAYS PRESENT.

As we grow older, we are not all alike. In fact, we become more ourselves and less like other people.

Although we are different from each other, we do have some common needs and interests. One of these is the need for fire safety.

Consider these facts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Risk of fire death compared to the general population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>Twice as likely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 84</td>
<td>Almost three times as likely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 and over</td>
<td>Almost four times as likely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Major causes of home fire death for people age 65 and over

- **Smoking**: Abandoned, discarded cigarettes, and cigars or falling asleep while smoking
- **Heating**: Combustibles too close to portable heating units
- **Cooking**: Combustibles and clothing too close to stove or cooking left unattended
- **Electrical**: Ground faults, short circuits, broken wiring

Fire death rates for older adults are higher than for the general population.
A FIRE NEEDS THREE THINGS TO GROW.

You can reduce your chance of being a fire victim by increasing your knowledge of fire.

Fuel

Fuel is anything that will burn. Our homes contain many sources of fuel.

- Ordinary Combustibles
  - Paper
  - Wood
  - Cloth
  - Furniture

- Flammable Liquids
  - Gasoline
  - Kerosene
  - Cooking oil
  - Oil based paint

- Electrical Equipment
  - Appliances
  - Outlets
  - Fuse boxes

Heat

Fuel must be hot enough to burn. Keep fuel away from heat sources. Our homes contain many sources of heat.

- Stove and oven
- Clothes dryer
- Toaster
- Hair dryer
- Heating pad
- Curling iron
- Coffee pot
- Hot water heater
- Furnace
- Matches and lighters

Oxygen

A fire needs oxygen to burn. Oxygen is in the air all around us.

Portable oxygen cylinders contain pressurized oxygen which can speed up a fire's growth.

During a fire, oxygen in the blood is replaced by carbon monoxide. High levels of carbon monoxide cause death.
PUTTING OUT A FIRE

Take away the fuel.
Move the fuel away from the heat or turn off the fuel source. When all of the fuel is used up, the fire goes out.

Take away the heat.
Fuel must be hot enough to burn. Removing the heat source or cooling the fuel puts the fire out. Turning off the burner removes the heat source.

Take away the oxygen.
Smothering a fire removes the oxygen supply needed to keep the fire going. When grease in a pan catches on fire, covering the pan with a lid prevents oxygen from getting to the fire. When most of the oxygen is used up, the fire goes out.

Use portable oxygen carefully.
Make sure no one smokes near pressurized oxygen cylinders and periodically test your equipment for leaks.
NEVER RUN IF YOUR CLOTHING CATCHES ON FIRE.

If your clothes catch on fire, it is important to stop, drop, and roll. Rolling smothers the fire. Running will fan the fire, making it worse.

**Stop**
Stop where you are.
Do not run.

**Drop**
Drop quickly to the floor.

**Roll**
Cover your face with your hands.
Roll around until the fire is out.

SMOKE IS OFTEN THE MOST DANGEROUS ELEMENT OF FIRE.

Smoke is a mixture of hot vapors, poisonous gases, and fuel particles that is produced when materials burn. Most people die in fires because they breathe too much smoke.

Smoke moves through a house much faster than flames and heat. It rises to the highest level possible. Smoke on the first floor will quickly travel up the stairs and fill the upper levels of a house.

**Tips to reduce smoke exposure**
- Sleep with your bedroom door shut.
- Install and maintain smoke detectors.
- If a fire is discovered, close the door to the fire area to reduce smoke movement.
- Stay low under the smoke while evacuating.
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