

Step by Step: A home safety checklist

By Erin K. Witt

An accident or injury can occur in any part of your home. Some safety hazards are obvious, such as a toy truck left lying at the top of the stairs. But others are not so easily identified, like a stairway railing that has become loose. The following checklists will help homeowners protect themselves and their loved ones while at home.

To avoid home accidents inside:

- Fasten carpet edges and tuck cords away to avoid falls.
- Place skid guards under throw rugs or secure the rugs to the floor.
- Secure bureaus and bookshelves with brackets to prevent them from being pulled over.
- Put non-skid mats or appliqués in tubs and showers.
- Lock poisonous items away where children can't reach them, and post the poison control number near the phone.
- Always clearly label household cleaners and chemicals.
- Don't operate any fireplace without a screen.
- Make sure all electrical cords are free from damage and fraying.
- Use ground-fault circuit interrupters with your outlets.
- Install a smoke detector on each floor of your home, and in the hallways between bedrooms. Test all smoke detectors monthly, and replace batteries every six months.
- Keep several fire extinguishers throughout the house.
- Make sure all stairways have adequate lighting and handrails.
- Wipe up spills immediately.
- Install stove locks, dishwasher locks, toilet locks and other childproofing equipment if infants or toddlers are in the home.

To avoid accidents outside your home:

- Keep walkways clear of toys or other objects that can block the path.
- Make sure all walkways and stairs are well lit.
- Promptly clear all walkways of snow and ice, and salt if they could be slippery.
- Repair significant cracks or holes in sidewalks and stairs.
- Keep garbage cans securely covered.
- Make sure swing sets and play equipment are free of rust and sharp edges, and have annual maintenance.
- Install a soft material like wood chips or foam under swing sets and play equipment to cushion falls.
- Fence in all pools and outdoor Jacuzzis.

To protect your home:

- ❑ Lock doors and windows at night and when you aren't home.
- ❑ Install deadbolts and pickproof locks.
- ❑ Put in motion-detector lights around your house.
- ❑ Install window bars or a home alarm system.
- ❑ Create a barrier under windows with prickly shrubs.
- ❑ Make sure your home exterior is well lit with no deep shadows.
- ❑ Put a piece of wood in the track of sliding windows and doors.
- ❑ Join your local neighborhood watch.
- ❑ Set timers for lights and the television when you aren't home.
- ❑ Keep expensive items where they can't be seen from outside.
- ❑ Hide valuables in unusual places, such as the freezer, a false wall outlet, or in the bathroom.
- ❑ Consider buying a home safe for smaller valuables.

Don't hide keys in a planter or under the doormat.