

Ten must-have items for a safe home

By Erin K. Witt

For most people, the home is where you expect to feel the safest. Unfortunately, the National Safety Council reports that over 8,000,000 Americans suffer disabling injuries in the home, with an additional 33,200 injuries resulting in death every year. Accidental injuries also are the number one killer of children in the United States, according to the American College of Emergency Physicians.

The hazards of “home sweet home” are many—falls, fires, burns and accidental poisonings are just a few of the most common offenders.

Of course, there are steps that can be taken to drastically reduce the chance of any home accidents. Safety experts say that over 90 percent of all casualties could have been prevented. They happen because of lack of information, carelessness, or unsafe conditions. But since every mishap cannot be avoided, keeping your home well prepared for the inevitable is the next best thing.

The National Safety Council offers the following list of safety items that should be found in every home—but this list is not all-inclusive. Consumers should know that the age and layout of their home; extra amenities such as whirlpool tubs, pools or fireplaces; and the age, sex, body build and health of the occupants of the home can all dictate additional safety needs.

Adding any of these items to your home, increases your chances of emerging from a domestic accident free of injury and fatality, and can even reduce the chance of property damage.

Tip #1: Smoke detector. Most home deaths happen between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., with many victims perishing because of smoke and toxic gases, not the fire itself. Install smoke detectors on every level of your home, including the basement, workshop and especially near bedrooms. Be sure to test batteries at least once a month and never remove batteries from a smoke detector except to replace them.

Tip #2: Carbon monoxide detector. Because deadly carbon monoxide is odorless, colorless and tasteless, it often goes undetected. Carbon monoxide is a normal byproduct of combustion, making any fuel-burning appliance in your home a potential source of this highly toxic gas. Every home should have at least one carbon monoxide detector placed in an area near the bedrooms. Be sure your detector displays the Underwriters Laboratories (UL 2034) label.

Tip #3: Ground-fault circuit interrupter. A ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) is an electronic device that helps protect you from serious injury by monitoring the electricity flowing in a circuit. If an imbalance occurs, the GFCI will almost instantly shut off the current flowing through the circuit. A GFCI is essential in circuits to bathrooms, laundry facilities, kitchens, swimming pools and outdoor receptacles. Test the GFCI monthly by pressing the test button and then the reset button

Tip #4: Fire extinguisher. Although fire extinguishers come in many different types, a multi-purpose dry chemical Class ABC fire extinguisher is the best choice for general home use. Mount the extinguisher on a bracket on the wall near an exit so that anyone using it can easily escape from the room if a fire spreads. Of course, it is equally important that all occupants of the home know how and when to properly use the extinguisher.

Tip #5: List of emergency phone numbers. Post a list of emergency numbers including police, fire, physicians and poison-prevention centers at every telephone in the home. The poison control number (1-800-222-1222) should also always be kept at the ready, or better yet, memorized. In the event of an emergency, even a very young child can phone for help if the number is available.

Tip #6: Tagged shutoffs. Place tags on the shutoff valves in your home for gas, oil and water, and the main shutoff for your electrical supply. Make sure all family members know how to safely turn off these services to your home in the event of an emergency.

Tip #7: Adequate lighting. Falls in the home lead to an estimated 15,400 deaths each year. To prevent such tragedies or other avoidable injuries, use nightlights near bathrooms, bedrooms and stairwells. Make sure stairwells, hallways and all entrances to your home are always adequately lit.

Tip #8: First aid kit. Keep a well-stocked first aid kit, including ipecac syrup, in your home. Make sure everyone knows where to find it and how and when to use the items in it.

Tip #9: Handrails. Every set of stairs in your home—whether indoors or out—should have handrails securely mounted to both sides. Grab bars should also be installed in all bathtubs and shower stalls. Firmly anchor them into the wall studding with long screws.

Tip #10: Tested appliances. All electric and gas appliances in your home should carry the Underwriters Laboratories (UL), Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or American Gas Association (AGA) designation.