



Office of  
Mental Health

# Fire Safety Reference Guide for Supervised Community Residences

## Booklet 4: *Fire Prevention*





# **FIRE SAFETY REFERENCE GUIDE FOR SUPERVISED COMMUNITY RESIDENCES**

---

## **Booklet 4: *Fire Prevention***

### **Contents:**

Maintaining a Safe Home

Sample of Weekly Environment Safety Checklist

**This is Booklet 4 in a series of 5 booklets.**

### ***Other booklets include:***

**Booklet 1:** *Self-Preservation*

**Booklet 2:** *Evacuation Planning*

**Booklet 3:** *Fire Drills*

**Booklet 5:** *Fire Safety Equipment*

*Developed by the NYS Office of Mental Health  
Available online at [www.omh.ny.gov](http://www.omh.ny.gov)*

**Revised October 2015**

**Please note that this booklet is  
a supplement to Basic Fire Safety Training.**

***Staff are expected to participate in fire safety training before they use this booklet.*** This booklet is designed to reinforce materials presented during training and to provide samples/templates of forms associated with the topics discussed. It is recommended that fire safety training be provided at least annually.

The Office of Mental Health (OMH) in conjunction with the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and the Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) developed an on-line training program that can be used by agencies as a core for Basic Fire Safety Training. This training program for staff of supervised community residences is located at [OMH.NY.GOV](http://OMH.NY.GOV).

# BOOKLET 4:

## *Fire Prevention*



## MAINTAINING A SAFE HOME

### **Why is it important to continuously maintain the residence in a safe condition?**

From a fire safety point, there are two important reasons to keep a home safe. The primary reason is fire prevention and the other is safe exiting in an emergency.

### **What is fire prevention?**

Fire prevention is the actions people take to reduce the risk of a fire starting in the home. A good fire prevention program reduces potential hazards, thus reducing the risk of a fire. Using a checklist to periodically evaluate the home will help ensure that the house is safe for residents.

### **What items are considered potential hazards in a residence?**

Potential hazards are defined as: Things that may ignite or may contribute to greater fire spread, injury, or loss. Potential hazards include: cooking, electrical, heating, open flames, smoking and housekeeping.

## How often should hazards be monitored by staff?

- Every day and all the time. If a hazard is noted it should be reported immediately and corrected as soon as possible. Don't assume someone else already reported an identified hazard.
- A safety hazard checklist should be completed at least once a month (see Attachment 1). This checklist should be reviewed by the program's supervisor.

## What can be done to reduce hazards when cooking?

### **Some ways of reducing cooking hazards include, but are not limited to:**

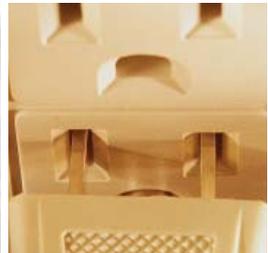
- Don't leave the immediate area when cooking. This is very important when frying foods or using the top burners. Always shut off stove burners when leaving the kitchen area.
- If using the oven, make sure to set a timer that is loud enough to be heard.
- Don't use kitchen towels as pot holders. If a towel touches a hot range/oven heating coil it will catch on fire.
- Keep items that can burn away from an open flame or electric coils. This includes paper towels, cooking oil, plastic bags, etc.
- Don't use the oven for storage. Always check the oven to confirm it is empty before turning on.
- Don't wear loose fitting clothes. A loose sweater sleeve near a hot coil could catch on fire.
- Don't run electrical appliance wires across the top of a stove.
- Never use an outdoor barbecue grill inside the house.
- Keep outdoor barbecue grill away from the house.
- Maintain a safe area around the outdoor barbecue grill including removing any combustible materials (paper, plastic, flammable liquids) and locate the grill away from the outside wall of the home.
- Never use an outdoor barbecue grill under any building overhang, roof covering or in a garage or a shed.
- Never leave an outdoor barbecue grill unattended during use.



## What can be done to reduce electrical hazards?

**Some ways of reducing electrical hazards include, but are not limited to:**

- Don't overload electrical outlets. The standard duplex (double) outlet is designed to handle 2 electrical devices. Adding extension cords, power strips and outlet expanders (making a double outlet into six outlets) can easily overload a circuit.
- If a plugged in wire feels hot near the outlet, it can be assumed that the outlet is overloaded.
- Regularly check the condition of cords and plugs on lamps and appliances. These may become worn or broken over time.
- Don't run cords under rugs or carpets
- Use the correct wattage light bulbs. Don't use higher wattage light bulbs than what is recommended by the manufacturer.
- Electrical appliances should be UL (Underwriters Laboratory) approved.
- Unplug kitchen counter top appliances when not in use.



## What can be done to reduce heating hazards?

- Have your heating system and hot water tank checked and cleaned on a regular basis including chimneys.
- Keep all combustibles away from furnaces and hot water tanks. A good rule to follow is to keep all items at least 36 inches away from furnaces and hot water heaters.
- Never use kerosene or propane portable space heaters in the residence.
- Electric portable space heaters must to be approved by OMH before use and should only be used as a temporary solution to a heating problem. Electric space heaters should have auto shut off if tipped and meet UL standards. These units use a large amount of electricity and can easily overload a circuit. Never use an extension cord with an electric space heater.
- Curtains and bedding must not contact electric baseboard heating units. Many manufacturers recommend that curtains be at least 8 inches above the top of an electric baseboard heater and have 3 inches of clearance in front of the heater. Any electric outlet above electric baseboard heating should be covered with a blank plate to prevent its use.
- All wood stoves or fireplaces must have prior approval from OMH. If approved:
  1. Fireplaces and wood stoves must be inspected and cleaned at least annually.
  2. Fires in a fireplace or wood stove must be monitored at all times and not be left unattended.
  3. Fireplace screens or doors must be used at all times.
  4. 36 inch combustible free area must be maintained around a fireplace or wood stove.



## What can be done to reduce hazards from open flames?

- Find substitutes for candles. LED battery operated candles are available and provide the overall effect of a real candle.
- There is no need to use or store matches in the home. The primary problem with matches is disposal; as a lighted match can accidentally be thrown in a garbage pail or on a rug. A butane lighter is a better option if an open flame is required.
- If staff or residents are allowed to smoke on the grounds, cigarette lighters should remain under the control of house staff.
- If the home uses natural gas or bottled gas for cooking or hot water heating it is important that the proper cover is installed to protect the pilot light. Some newer gas systems do not have pilot lights and use an electronic ignition.



## What can be done to reduce the hazards from people smoking at the home?

- Develop very clear policies regarding smoking at the residence. Each resident should get a copy of the smoking rules as part of their admission packet.
- If smoking is allowed in the residence, it should be confined to one area where there are non-tip ashtrays and a fire rated receptacle. Furniture and flooring should be installed that are not readily combustible.
- Don't ever allow smoking in bedrooms.
- Identify an outdoor area that is at least 30 feet from the house for smoking. This area should be marked as a smoking area and have non-tip ash trays and a fire rated receptacle.
- Always make sure ashes are cold before dumping ash trays or receptacles into garbage pails.

# What can be done to reduce hazards related to housekeeping?

## **Clothes dryers:**

- Clean and empty lint filters after every use.
- Use dryer vent ducts made of metal, heavy aluminum, or rigid plastic. Plastic or light foil corrugated ducts should be replaced with durable materials. Corrugated materials tend to capture excessive amounts of lint.
- Dryer should always be vented directly to the outside of the home.
- Check the outside dryer vent periodically for any blockages, such as; leaves, snow, lint or other debris.
- If it seems to be taking a longer time to dry clothing, inspect the lint filter and the duct line to verify that the airway is clear. Be sure to unplug dryer before beginning an inspection of the venting system.
- Schedule an annual inspection of the entire venting system completed by a professional.
- Never leave the dryer running when no one is at home.

## **Kitchen exhaust fans/hoods:**

- Clean fans and hoods regularly with a quality grease cutter.
- Remove and clean air filters on exhaust fans and hoods regularly.
- Install light bulbs that are the right style and wattage for the hood and make sure they are properly protected.

## **Garbage:**

- Empty garbage pails at least daily.
- Don't store large refuse containers inside the house or in an attached garage.
- Keep a cover on all refuse containers.

## **Clutter:**

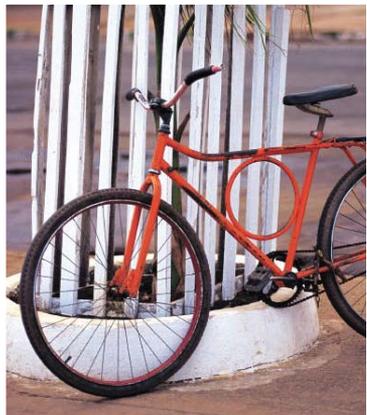
- Use basements for minimal amounts of storage. For example: seasonal clothes or holiday decorations.
- Don't store flammable liquids (gasoline, kerosene, lighter fluid, etc.) in the home.
- Don't store items near heat producing equipment: furnaces, hot water heaters, clothes dryers.
- Store items in boxes and not loose.
- Monitor and control the amount of non-essential items in bedrooms,

as an overabundance of things in bedrooms can create a serious fire and exiting hazard. Staff need to instruct and work with residents on reducing the accumulation of things.

**Obstructions:**

- Never leave household items in the path of travel. Vacuum cleaners and cleaning equipment should be put away right after use.
- Don't block exits with furniture or decorations.
- Don't leave bicycles or other sports equipment near exits.
- Never store anything on indoor or outdoor stairs.
- Keep all outside pathways clear. During the winter regularly check sidewalks and exit ways for accumulation of snow or ice.

**Reminder:** *Things change around the home during the course of a day, week, month... Staff need to monitor hazards every day and all of the time. If a hazard is noted, it should be reported immediately and corrected as soon as possible. Don't assume someone else already noticed the hazard and reported it.*



**ATTACHMENT #1: Sample of Weekly Environment Safety Checklist**

Residence: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Completed: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Person completing form: \_\_\_\_\_

Check marks in **green boxes** (gray boxes for black and white copies) mean the item passes. Check marks in **white boxes** mean further action is required.

Area: <b>Kitchen</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Is the stove and the hood/fan over stove free of grease?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Is the area around the top of the stove free of clutter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Is the oven being used for storage?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the toaster oven clean and free of debris?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are any extension cords being used in the kitchen?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are all light bulbs working and are they the correct wattage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Do any outlets have more than two cords plugged into them?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there anything blocking any doorway?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are flammable liquids other than cooking oil in the kitchen?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the garbage bag full?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Area: <b>Living Room</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Are any exits from the living room blocked?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Does any furniture restrict the flow of movement in the room?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any extension cords in use?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
If extension cords are in use are they frayed, broken or overloaded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any electrical wires located where they can be stepped on or tripped over?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are all light bulbs working and are they the correct wattage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Do any outlets have more than two cords plugged into them?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any wires running under rugs or carpets?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**ATTACHMENT #1: Sample of Weekly Environment Safety Checklist**

Area: <b>Bedrooms</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Are any bedroom doors blocked?			
Is there an abundance of clutter in any bedroom?			
If there is electric baseboard heat in the bedrooms, are the units obstructed by curtains or bedding?			
Are there any electrical wires located where they can be stepped on or tripped over?			
Are any extension cords being used in the bedrooms?			
If extension cords are in use are they frayed, broken or overloaded?			
Do any outlets have more than two cords plugged into them?			
Are all light bulbs working and are they the correct wattage?			
Is there any evidence (ashtray, cigarette butts, burn marks) that the recipient is smoking in their room?			

Area: <b>Attic/Basement</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Is the attic used for storage?			
If attic is used for storage, does it have a sprinkler system and is everything neatly stored and boxed?			
Is the basement used for storage?			
If the basement is used for storage, is everything neatly stored and boxed?			
Is there any storage within 36" of the heating unit?			
Is there any storage within 36" of the hot water heater?			
Do any outlets have more than two cords plugged into them?			

Area: <b>Laundry</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Is the dryer lint trap empty?			
Is there any clutter stored around dryer?			
Is the vent hose line connected to the outside?			

**ATTACHMENT #1: Sample of Weekly Environment Safety Checklist**

Area: <b>Attached Garage</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Does the house have an attached garage?			
If yes, is there any storage of flammable liquids?			
If yes, are they stored in a metal cabinet designed for flammables?			
Are there large refuse pails in the garage?			
If yes, are they covered?			
Is the garage used for storage?			
If yes, is the storage limited and is it properly boxed?			
Are any electrical outlets overloaded?			

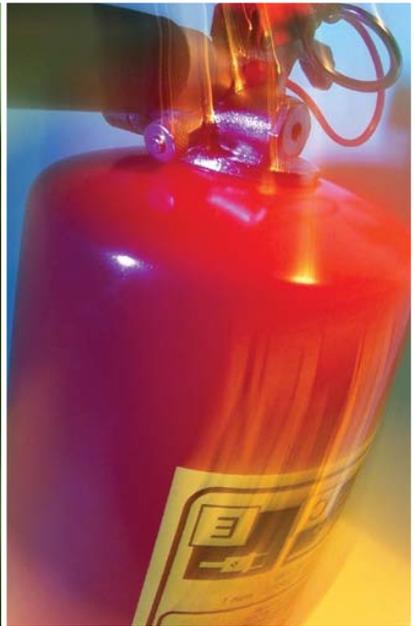
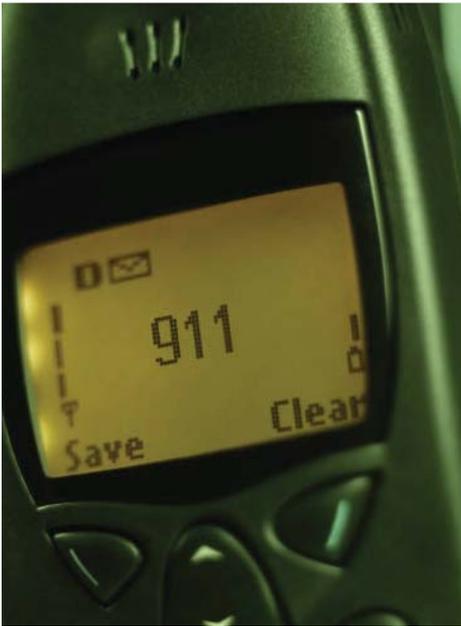
Area: <b>Outside</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Are sidewalks clear?			
Are steps and stairs clear?			
Is there a designated smoking area outside the home?			
If yes, Are there sturdy ashtrays or ash pails available?			
If yes, are the ashtrays full of cigarette butts?			
Is the designated meeting area clear and accessible?			

Area: <b>Evacuation Route</b>	No	Yes	Repairs or Action needed
Are exit pathways free from obstructions?			
Are all exit doors operational?			

**Complete copies of the  
Weekly Environment Safety Checklist Form  
is located at [www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/firesafety/](http://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/firesafety/).**



**Additional copies of this brochure are located at  
[www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/firesafety/](http://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/firesafety/).**



Developed by the NYS Office of Mental Health  
Available online at [www.omh.ny.gov](http://www.omh.ny.gov)