

# STRUCTURAL FIRE

## WHAT IT IS

Over 4,000 Americans die each year and 25,000 are injured in fires. Fire can start fast – in less than 30 seconds a small flame can turn into a major fire. It also spreads quickly, both vertically and across enclosed spaces. In five minutes a residence can be engulfed in flames. Moreover, even in areas without flames, smoke and heat can be lethal due to burns (exterior or to the throat and lungs), asphyxiation, disorientation, or simple panic.

## WHAT TO DO

### Before (Preparedness/ Mitigation)

- ❑ Install smoke alarms and change the batteries every six months.
- ❑ Have fire extinguishers on each floor in your house, in known and easy-to-grab locations, and know how to use them; be sure the extinguisher in your kitchen is designed for grease fires.
- ❑ Check that fire extinguishers are sufficiently pressurized every six months.
- ❑ Have and exercise a household evacuation plan that includes two ways to get out of each room in the event the primary way is blocked by fire or smoke.
- ❑ Be sure your wiring and circuit breaker box are up to code.
- ❑ Install GFCI outlets in all bathrooms, kitchens, and other areas where water may come into contact with electrical appliances.
- ❑ Have adequate homeowners or renters insurance.
- ❑ Inspect extension cords for frayed or exposed wiring or loose plugs.
- ❑ “Babyproof” electrical outlets.
- ❑ Get your chimney cleaned on a regular basis.
- ❑ Do not store used rags soaked with painting or cleaning chemicals.
- ❑ Do not keep spare fuel tanks (propane or gasoline) indoors, including in an attached garage.
- ❑ Do not smoke in bed.
- ❑ Be careful when using alternative heating sources (for example, space heaters). Never leave these heating sources unattended.
- ❑ Never use a device meant for cooking or outside use (for example, a camp stove or deep-fryer) as an interior heat source.

## KEY TERMS

- ▶ **Asphyxiation** is when a person is deprived of oxygen, which may lead to unconsciousness or death. It is the leading cause of death in house fires.
- ▶ A **First Degree Burn** is a superficial burn that produces redness.
- ▶ A **Second Degree Burn** is a partial-thickness burn that produces redness and blistering.
- ▶ A **Third Degree Burn** is a full-thickness burn that kills nerve endings and completely burns flesh. If there is a third degree burn, there will also be second and first degree burning around the burn site. Third degree burns over any considerable amount of a person’s body can be fatal.

- ❑ Never leave a burning candle unattended. Consider using battery-operated flameless candles.
- ❑ Learn First Aid.
- ❑ Refer to “Medical Emergency,” below.

### During (Response)

- ❑ Use a fire extinguisher to put out small fires. Never use water on an electrical or grease fire.
- ❑ If your clothes are on fire, “stop, drop, and roll” until the fire is extinguished.
- ❑ If you are escaping through a closed door, use the back of your hand to feel for heat.
- ❑ Crawl low under the smoke to your exit.
- ❑ Close doors behind you to delay the spread of fire.
- ❑ Do not gather valuables or use the phone while exiting a burning structure. Just get out.
- ❑ Once you are out safely, call 911.
- ❑ Once the fire department arrives on the scene, go to the first unit and tell them that all family members are out or accounted for including pets.
- ❑ Do not remain in a burning structure to save a pet that does not want to leave.

### After (Recovery)

- ❑ Seek medical attention as needed.
- ❑ Do not go back into a burning structure for any reason until authorities say it is safe to do so.
- ❑ Call your insurance agent.
- ❑ Contact your local disaster relief services if you need housing, food or a place to stay.
- ❑ In many cases, your home or the building you were residing in may be deemed a hazard and you may not be able to return for a lengthy period of time.