

MOSSEL BAY FIRE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Fire Safety for the Elderly

The majority of fire deaths in South Africa happen in the home and according to the Medical Research Council, around 1.6 million South Africans will suffer burn injuries each year as a result of a house fire. Older South Africans are no more likely to have a fire than anyone else. However, they are more likely to be a victim of fire should it happen.

Why are the elderly more vulnerable?

Some elderly people are particularly at risk from fire because of their reduced mobility or existing health problems. Elderly people falling asleep in a chair or in bed with a lit cigarette, cause a huge number of deaths each year. And for people who live alone, the risks significantly increase.

But [fires are preventable with these simple precautions](#).

Safety in the kitchen

When you are in the kitchen, it's crucial that you take extra care as this is where most house fires start.

- Keep all leads and appliances away from water.
- When cooking on the hob, make sure pan handles are away from the front of the cooker, to avoid knocking them over.
- Always keep a close eye on the cooker and use a timer to remind you that something's cooking.
- Be careful if you wear loose clothing as it can easily and quickly catch fire.
- If you are deep fat frying, then take extra care and if the oil starts to smoke, then it's too hot, so turn off the heat and let it cool.

Never leave the kitchen when something is cooking on the hob, either take pans off the heat or turn them down. And when you are finished cooking, double check the cooker is switched off.

Plan a safe escape

Having [smoke alarms in your home](#) is essential to protecting yourself from fire. But you also need to know how to get out of the house and safely in the event of a fire.

- Make sure everyone knows the safest escape route out of the house.
- Always keep exits clear.

- The normal way in and out of your home is the best route, but plan a second route if the first becomes blocked.
- Practice your escape route.

What to do if there is a fire

If there is a fire, every second counts so phone the fire brigade immediately on **0446913722** by telephone or **112** by cellular phone. In fact, having all the emergency numbers in one place means you are prepared for any emergency. Always leave fires for the emergency services to deal with. The priority is for you and everyone else in the house to get out as soon as possible. Don't worry about valuables.

Bedtime checks

It's always a good idea to check your home is safe before going to bed as you are most at risk from fire at night.

- Shut all doors to prevent a potential fire from spreading.
 - Switch off and unplug electrical appliances, including heaters.
 - Make sure the cooker is switched off.
 - Put cigarettes and candles out properly.
 - Make sure nothing is blocking the exits.
 - Check that window and door keys are where everyone can easily find them.

Conclusion

Home safety is something all seniors should take very seriously. As we age, we become a little less physically capable as we once were and can become more vulnerable to injuries within our home. Accidents can occur anywhere within the confines of our residency, so a home safety checklist for seniors is highly recommended.