

Do You Have Any of These 10 Home Fire Hazards?

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Most homeowners know the drill for [reducing the risk](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/protection/) of a house fire: They keep a smoke detector on each floor and make sure they are all in good working order at least twice a year. They closely monitor cooking, candles, [wood stoves and fireplaces](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/wood-stove-fireplace-tips/). They also refrain from smoking indoors. Matches and lighters are also stowed away where children cannot reach them.

Although all these precautions are an excellent start for promoting fire safety at home, they don’t necessarily protect you from every fire hazard. Here are 10 home fire hazards you might not realize you have, and how to safely use, store or dispose of each item to reduce the risk of fire.

**1. Worn Electrical Cords**

The electrical cords on any appliances that you frequently move—such as your vacuum cleaner or power tools, or even your laptop—can end up taking a great deal of abuse. Although power cords have no expiration date, they can wear out over time as they are used and abused.

For instance, the insulation around the power cord can wear away, either from the cord’s overheating or through misuse. If you’ve ever been guilty of pulling the vacuum cord out of the outlet by the cord itself rather than the plug, you may have weakened the insulation that surrounds the electrical cables. Similarly, electrical cords that run through high-traffic areas may lose their insulation as they are repeatedly stepped on. Cords that get caught or pinched between heavy furniture can see the same kind of damage.

These cords that have lost their insulation can potentially electrocute you, not to mention the fact that they are a serious home fire hazard.

**How to Protect Your Home**

If any appliances or extension cords in your home get hot to the touch or show signs of wear, do not use them. You can recycle worn extension cords at your local Best Buy. You can find safe and environmentally friendly ways to dispose of old appliances through the EPA’s [Responsible Appliance Disposal program](https://www.epa.gov/rad).

When it comes to extension cords, remember they are temporary solutions vs permanent fixes. Extension cords should not be used long-term to run appliances where the existing cord is inadequate for the power required. They also should not be relied on in homes with outdated wiring. For example, using an extension cord so you can plug a 3-prong item into a 2-prong outlet.

You can prevent your cords from wearing out in the first place by:

* Keeping cords out of the path of any foot traffic
* Not forcing cords into spaces that may pinch or crimp them
* Never using staples or nails to attach cords to a baseboard or wall

Finally, you should never run a cord under a rug or between a mattress. This prevents the cord from releasing heat and keeps it out of your sight, so you are less likely to notice if a problem develops.

**2. Recalled Appliances**

Even if your appliances have intact cords, they may still pose a fire threat to your home if they have been recalled. Some of the most recalled appliances include:

* Microwaves
* Lamps
* Indoor generators
* Washers and dryers
* Ovens
* Lamps
* Computer batteries

**How to Protect Your Home**

It’s a good idea to periodically check the Consumer Product Safety Commission’s [list of recalled items](https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls) to make sure nothing in your home appears on the list. Make looking over this list part of your twice-yearly [fire safety routine](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/safety/fire-preparation-tips/) when you’re also checking the batteries in your smoke detectors. If you discover that one of your appliances has been recalled, contact the manufacturer to determine the proper next steps for dealing with the issue.

**3. Space Heaters**

Having a space heater in the winter can often mean the difference between chattering teeth and cozy warmth. But because space heaters are portable, many users will place them too close to combustible items—like curtains, furniture, rugs or blankets.

Coil space heaters are especially dangerous, because the coils are so hot that they can quickly ignite anything flammable that comes into contact with them.

**How to Protect Your Home**

If you use a space heater in your home, make sure it is kept far away from any items that could catch fire. Also, the radiator-type space heaters that diffuse heat over the entire surface of the appliance are safer than the coil heaters, although you must keep both kinds away from flammable items. Finally, make sure your space heaters have been safety tested and [UL approved](https://www.ul.com/about). Be sure to follow proper usage instructions. For instance, you should never leave a space heater unattended. It also should not run all day.

**4. Clothes Dryers**

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), [local fire departments](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/fire-department/) respond to an estimated [15,970 home fires](https://www.nfpa.org/) involving clothes dryers or washing machines each year: 92% of these fires involved the clothes dryer.

So, what is it about clothes dryers that make them such a potent home fire hazard? Accumulated lint. This material is very flammable, and it can build up both in the lint trap and in the venting system. Since dryers use heated air to work, and exhaust that air through the vents, any lint in the system has the potential to ignite.

**How to Protect Your Home**

Cleaning the lint trap of your dryer before each use can do a great deal to prevent fires. However, that is not the only cleaning you need to do to protect yourself from this home fire hazard. Experts recommend having your dryer vents professionally cleaned every 12 to 24 months.

While hiring a professional is best, there are [DIY dryer vent cleaning kits](https://www.bobvila.com/articles/best-dryer-vent-cleaning-kits/) that can help keep you safe between cleanings.

In addition, know the warning signs that your dryer vents may need cleaning, including:

* An extra hot dryer
* Clothes that take a long time to dry
* A burning smell when you run the dryer

**5. Loose Outlets**

If plugs keep falling out of an outlet, it’s more than just a nuisance—it’s a major home fire hazard. That’s because the contacts in the wall have worn down, meaning they are not able to securely grip your plug, causing a missed electrical connection. This is a missed connection can cause electrical arcing (a spark wherein electricity jumps from one place to another), which can cause a fire.

**How to Protect Your Home**

Replacing loose outlets is a simple job for a professional electrician. In general, you can expect to spend $8 to $10 per outlet, although most electricians will have a minimum charge for your bill. If you are committed to DIY, there are many sites that will walk you through the process—but it’s always better to get professional help when you’re dealing with electrical work.

**6. Oily Rags** and Clothes

Changing your own oil is a great way to save money, but it can increase your risk of a home fire. That’s because oil-soaked rags can spontaneously combust—without any spark to ignite them. The same goes for clothes that get oily, which is common in many professions.

This is a risk whether the oil is from your car’s engine, from oil-based paint, from varnishes or from the vegetable oil you use in the kitchen.

Here’s how it works: The rags will slowly heat to the oil’s ignition point via oxidization. Oxidization causes a substance to release heat, and, if there is no place for the heat to dissipate—because the rags are in a pile, for instance—then the temperature will rise to the oil’s ignition point, starting a fire.

**How to Protect Your Home**

When you have oily rags that you wish to reuse, hang them up to dry outside or in a well-ventilated room before laundering them. This will allow the heat to dissipate safely as the rags dry and help prevent spontaneous combustion.

If you plan to dispose of oil-soaked rags, make sure you place them in a container with a tight-fitting lid, then fill the container with water. It is safest to use metal containers, but you can use a zip-top plastic bag as an alternative. From there, contact your garbage disposal service to find out how to properly dispose of the rags.

**7. Excess Sawdust**

Amateur woodworkers and home improvement DIYers know that sawdust is the inevitable result of their projects. Unfortunately, it is hazardous to allow sawdust to collect.

Not only does sawdust ignite and burn much more easily than whole pieces of lumber, but sawdust in the air ignites even more easily. Even a fine layer of sawdust poses a significant home fire hazard.

**How to Protect Your Home**

Make sure you regularly clean up any sawdust you create using a vacuum specifically made to collect combustible dust. Once the dust has been vacuumed up, it can be bagged in a plastic garbage bag and disposed of in the trash. If you plan to make a serious hobby of woodworking (or other sawdust-generating activity), invest in a good dust-collection system.

**8. Household Chemicals**

Your home is full of various chemicals that are potential fire hazards, including:

* Aerosol cans of cleaning solutions under your kitchen sink
* The bottle of nail polish remover in the bathroom cabinet
* Ammonia and bleach in the laundry room

Thankfully, unlike oily rags, these types of chemicals are not likely to spontaneously combust. Instead, they can sometimes emit combustible fumes or can catch fire if used too close to any kind of open flame or spark.

**How to Protect Your Home**

Make sure that you keep combustible household chemicals well away from anything that can cause a spark, including:

* Outlets
* Candles
* Fireplaces
* Lit cigarettes

**9. Crumbs in the Toaster**

Most people are not surprised to learn that [44% of all home fires in the U.S.](https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/research/nfpa-research/fire-statistical-reports/home-cooking-fires?l=205) are from cooking. After all, fire (or heat) is a necessary component of cooking. However, while you are perfectly aware of the potential fire hazards of using the stove and oven, you might overlook the possible danger lurking in the humble toaster.

Toasted bread generates crumbs, which can accumulate in the bottom of your toaster. These combustible crumbs can ignite during normal toasting and set the appliance on fire.

**How to Protect Your Home**

Most toasters have a removable tray on the bottom for easy cleaning. Make sure you clean out the tray regularly to mitigate this home fire hazard.

**10. Non-Dairy Coffee Creamer**

This innocuous grocery item may be your preferred coffee additive, but it is also a highly flammable substance. In fact, when powdered coffee creamer is suspended in the air, it is potentially more flammable than flour or rice dust. Everyone from YouTube stars to the Mythbusters team have used coffee creamer to create fireballs to show off its flammable nature.

The good news is that it would require much more creamer than you use in a normal cup of coffee to put yourself at risk. However, it’s important to recognize just how flammable your non-dairy coffee creamer is, just in case.

**How to Protect Your Home**

Keep your coffee creamer away from open flames—and if you should ever drop a whole container of the stuff, consider using a vacuum for combustible dust to clean it up.

By becoming aware of these 10 common—and not-so-common—fire hazards in the home, you can help protect both your family and your property. It’s also critical to know what you’d do in the event of a fire—whether it’s establishing your evacuation plan or having a fire extinguisher at the ready.