



22 Safety Items No Home Should Be Without

by Carla Merolla and Laura Coyne

Your home is your castle, but that doesn't mean you can pull the drawbridge and all will be safe. Plenty of dangers have already invaded your home. According to the National Safety Council, there were 29,500 deaths associated with the home in the year 2000.

Take an inventory of your home safety items so that you can be prepared to battle any emergency. You'll find that these are all essential to your family's safety. And, of course, feel free to add items to this list depending on your family's needs.

1. Smoke Detectors

According to the National Safety Council, fire kills more than 2,900 people and injures 16,000 others each year. Most fires that claim lives occur at night. Install smoke detectors on every floor and outside each bedroom. Test detectors once a month, and change batteries when you adjust your clocks in the spring and fall.

2. Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon monoxide - an odorless, colorless, and tasteless gas - killed 300 people last year and sent thousands more to the hospital. For between \$40 and \$170, a CO detector will alert you that deadly poison has begun to invade your home. Place a CO detector outside of your bedrooms.

3. Radon-Detector Kit

The Environmental Protection Association says radon might be responsible for up to 30,000 lung cancer deaths each year. Hardware stores carry do-it-yourself radon-detector kits for less than \$40. Follow directions carefully, especially regarding the placement and preparation of the room.

4. Night Lights

Babababobooooom. That's the sound your family hears when you topple down the stairs on your way to sneak a midnight snack. Simple, inexpensive night lights can prevent late-night falls. Place night lights away from flammable fabrics like bedspreads. Also, look for new night lights with cooler mini-neon bulbs. Most stores also carry state-of-the-art plug-ins that glow in the dark and then fade as day breaks. Be sure you have adequate lighting in all of your rooms.

5. Sensor Lights

Outdoor motion-sensor lights can help you see your way at night and scare off intruders. Usually, you can replace existing light fixtures with sensor lights without additional wiring.

6. Sturdy One-Step Stool

Can't reach Aunt Minnie's purple crocheted pillow covers in the back of the closet? And she's on her way over? You look around the room and your eyes settle on ... the rocking chair. Instead of doing a circus act, invest in a sturdy one-step stool to keep on hand when your arms need a boost.

Items to Childproof Your Home

Here are some other important safety items to add for those concerned with infant and toddler safety.

Baby Gates

Baby gates can keep curious kids away from danger zones, such as stairways. Opt for gates with straight-top edges and openings no larger than 1½ inches wide. Install gates at the top and bottom of stairs.

Anti-Scald Devices

Children are more susceptible to scalds than adults. National SAFE KIDS Campaign president Martin Eichelberger, MD, urges parents to purchase anti-scald devices that keep water temperature below a warm but safe 120°F.

Child-Safe Locks

Get on your hands and knees and crawl around your house. You've entered "Child World." Put child-safe locks on kitchen and bathroom cabinets. You can even buy latches for your toilet seats; it only takes 1 inch of water - and a few seconds - for a child to drown. Put locks on other areas where you want to restrict access, such as swimming pool fences and sheds with tools and chemicals.

Electrical Socket Protectors

Exposed electrical sockets invite curious little hands. Cover all outlets with plastic socket protectors. These inexpensive lifesavers are available at hardware stores and discount department stores.

7. Rubber Suction Bath Mats / Slip-Resistant Throw Rugs

You're wet. And so is the floor. A suction-type rubber mat or adhesive-backed appliques will keep you steady in the stall and tub. A nonskid rug outside the tub will prevent slips when you step out. Use slip-resistant rugs throughout your home.

8. Grab Bars

Hold on to a wall grab bar when you get in and out of the tub. If your bathroom doesn't have grab bars, you can purchase them at most hardware stores. Fasten them with long screws securely into the wall studding - not merely into the plaster, tile or wallboard.

9. Handrails

Every set of stairs, whether inside or outside your home, should have sturdy handrails securely mounted on both sides. Stairs and steps account for nearly half of all fatal falls in the home.

10. Deadbolt Locks

Put a deadbolt lock on every entrance to your home. Ask the locksmith for a deadbolt lock that's pick- and drill-proof. Such locks start at \$150. Invest in sturdy doors; a good lock doesn't serve its purpose on a flimsy door.

Another lock that's important is one for your gun cabinet. Always lock your gun, if you have one, and lock up your ammunition separately from your gun.

11. Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupters

GFCIs stop the "juice" before electricity can leak out and hurt you. Although most new homes come with GFCIs, older homes may not have them. You can replace outlets for \$9-\$13 each, or you can purchase plug-in or portable GFCIs for about \$12-\$30 each. Use them throughout your home, especially in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry room.

12. Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers have categories for different types of fires. For the home, experts recommend a "BC" or an "ABC" extinguisher. Never purchase or use an "A" extinguisher in your home. These water-based extinguishers can cause flames to splatter or cause shocks in an electrical fire, says Julie Reynolds of the National Fire Protection Association.

13. First-Aid Kit

The kit should include, among other items, antiseptic ointment, bandages and gauze pads in assorted sizes, adhesive tape, cold packs, disposable gloves, hand cleaner, scissors and tweezers, syrup of ipecac and eyewash. Check expiration dates and periodically restock. And educate yourself on how to treat injuries.

14. Flashlights

Keep flashlights where you can easily get to them in case of power outages and severe weather. Test them regularly. Keep extra batteries close by so that you don't have to fumble blindly in an emergency.

15. Fire-Safe Window Guards / Safety Glazing

Falls from windows cause death and serious injury to children each year. Don't rely on screens to prevent falls; they're only designed to keep bugs out. Never place furniture or beds next to windows where children can climb. Keep windows locked when not in use. If you use window guards, they must have a release mechanism so they can be opened in an emergency. Consult your fire department for proper placement. Children should also practice opening the window in their bedroom so that they

know how to escape out of a window. You also may need to purchase an emergency escape ladder.

Safety glazing prevents windows from shattering into shards of glass. Instead, if broken, the glass forms safe pellets. Look for a permanent mark in the lower corner showing the manufacturer's name, type of safety glass, and the thickness.

16. Written Family Evacuation Plan

Preparation and practice for all emergencies is vital for all families. Know the fastest way out of your home and how not to become trapped. Your home should include two exits from each room. Practice an evacuation plan with your family before a real emergency hits.

17. Family Disaster Kit

When disaster occurs, grab this kit to take with you. Such a kit would include such essential supplies as nonperishable food, water, cash, flashlights, tools, a battery-operated NOAA all-hazard alert radio, and a first-aid kit. To save time when evacuating, you can store this kit in a car or in an unattached garage.

18. NOAA All-Hazard Alert Radio

This radio will help you in a weather emergency, such as a tornado, hurricane, earthquake or other emergency. You'll pick up the frequency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which will include instructions on whether to stay in your home, when to evacuate, and the status of the emergency event. You can purchase such a radio at a local electronics store.

19. Posted Emergency Phone Numbers

Your posted list should include the local police and fire departments and your physician. Also include the numbers of friends or relatives as well as your local poison control number. The American Association of Poison Control Centers has established a nationwide number for people to use to reach their local poison control center. It's 800-222-1222. Post your list by every phone in the house.

20. Tested Appliances

Appliances using gas or electricity should bear the certification mark from a qualified testing organization, such as Underwriters Laboratories, the Canadian Standards Association or the American Gas Association.

21. Personal Protective Equipment

Safety goggles, work gloves, face masks, and hard hats are all must-haves for do-it-yourselfers. Protect yourself when tackling that next home project.

22. Tagged Shutoffs

Know how to shut off valves for gas, oil, water, and your home's main electrical supply. Tag each valve so you can easily identify the switch in an emergency.

