



## **HOME DANGER ZONES**

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**Everyone wants their home to be safe and free from dangers. Some of the most common items and appliances in a home can be harbingers of hazards, and knowing what to be wary of will help you prevent any unforeseen issues down the road.**

Listed below are the top areas in a home that can potentially lead to problems, and what you can do to prevent them from occurring.

## **Cooktops**

Statistics show that 40 percent of fires start in the kitchen ([redcross.org](http://redcross.org)), and many of those are a result of the cooktop or stovetop. Prevent issues and fires in the kitchen by storing combustibles away from the gas or electric burners (paper towels, pot holders, etc.). Also, it's always a good idea not to leave burners unattended when in use, especially when boiling water or heating oils.

## **Dryers**

Dryers also have the potential to start fires in the home. Lint can build up inside the dryer cabinet, where the heating element is housed, creating a fire hazard. Clean the lint trap each time you use the dryer, and brush or vacuum buildup around the lint filter every couple of months. Dryer maintenance is also important – have the cabinet cleaned out every two years to prevent potential buildups that could cause a fire.

## **Washing Machines**

Old hoses have the capability of bursting, which can result in a torrent of water gushing into your laundry room or area, and any low placed electrical outlets could be impacted by water leaks. Replace any old hoses with braided steel hoses, which can be found at any home improvement store or website. Also, check hoses regularly for any leaks or loose connections.

## **Pipes**

In the fall and winter when temperatures drop, pipes can freeze and crack. A pipe with a 1/8 of an inch crack can leak up to 250 gallons of water per day ([thisoldhouse.com](http://thisoldhouse.com)). Pipes should be insulated to prevent cracking, and before the temperature drops turn off the water supply to outdoor spigots and leave taps open to relieve any internal pressure buildups that could wreak havoc on your home.

## **Smoke Detectors**

We've all heard the very annoying chirp of a dying smoke detector. Dead, dying or missing batteries are the top reasons for smoke detector malfunctions. Batteries should be changed at least once a year, and older models that are over 10 years old should be replaced. Some detectors are also equipped with a test mode, so testing your detectors throughout the year will also help indicate if any maintenance needs to take place.

## **Fireplaces**

Fireplaces are more prone for use in the winter months in those regions where the cold temperatures set in. Creosote buildup can cause chimney fires, where sparks fly out and ignite rugs and furniture. For avid chimney users, have your chimney swept once a year, and remember to keep the screen closed when not using the fireplace. It's also important to have your chimney damper or flue open before lighting a fire and when it's in use.

## **Electrical Wiring**

Bad wiring in a home can short out and potentially start a fire, and a lot of times you won't be able to see direct issues with electrical wires. Signs to look for are frequent blown fuses, flickering lights, or feeling a tingling sensation when a wall switch or appliance is touched. If you have a home that is more than 40 years old, consider replacing the wiring and updating the electrical systems.

## **Roofs**

Roofs are known for providing excellent space for snow and ice buildup. A roof that is too warm will cause snow to melt. When this happens, runoff freezes in gutters, which forms into ice, creating a dam that forces water below the shingles. To help prevent issues, make sure your roof is properly insulated by adding attic insulation and vents, which will help keep the roof cool and prevent snow melt.

## **Gutters**

In the fall and winter months, gutters have the tendency to become clogged and backed up by rogue leaves and debris. When gutters become clogged, they can overflow, which allows water to pool around home foundations, potentially leading to basement leaks or water underneath the house. If you live in an area with lots of trees, clean gutters regularly during the fall months to help prevent clogs and potential problems, and clean them again in the spring.

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