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On guard at home Falls, burns top list of dwelling dangers

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There's no place like home.

This phrase, made popular by Dorothy Gale in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, still holds very true today as people race through their work days in order to get to the comfort and relaxation that can only be found in the home.

This sense of ease that the comfort of home creates, however, is often the doorway to dangerous situations that result in more than 10 million emergency room visits, 20 million injuries and thousands of deaths each year.

"When you are at home, you let your guard down and that is when some of the serious home safety problems start to pop up," Chief Warrant Officer 4 Joseph Reese, senior maintenance/logistics officer at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, said recently. "When you are at work, there is always someone on you about doing things right but that doesn't always happen at home."

Officials at the Home Safety Council report that the home is the second most common location for unintentional fatal injuries in the United States, with motor vehicles traveling on the road being first.

So, how do you keep your haven from everyday stress home safe home and not a place where danger is lurking around every corner? Reese said a successful home safety plan involves many of the same risk mitigation tools people use at work every day.

"The same hazards that can hurt you at work are often present in the home so the same precautions you take at work should be taken at home," he said. "Remember, think things through, be a safety buddy for your spouse, your kids and your friends, and use the right equipment."

The biggest home threat that causes many injuries and deaths each year is falls, according to statistics released by the Home Safety Council. Reese said the Army Safety Center has logged more than a dozen reports of at home falls in the past three years that have resulted in significant injuries to Soldiers.



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Reese said to avoid falls at home, people must remember to remove things like toys from high traffic areas, keep stairs well lit, wipe up water and grease spills as soon as they occur and never use a ladder without a buddy.

“You wouldn’t leave things on the stairs at work so you shouldn’t do it at home either,” he said.

Burns also account for many home injuries every year. To avoid this common danger, Reese reminds everyone to “cook with caution.” Whether working on a stove or a grill, all chefs should remember to follow safety rules, move pot and pan handles out of the reach of children, keep a pan lid easily accessible to put out grease fires, never use too much lighter fluid on charcoal and never leave grills unattended.

Home improvement projects, including lawn and garden maintenance, can also lead to a variety of home injuries. With the popularity of home improvement projects growing, it is important to remember that not every project can be completed by the home owner alone.

“Before you start, you have to do the research and determine if the project is within your skill level,” Reese said.

If you do start a home improvement project that includes tools, it is important to read the manual for all the tools to ensure proper operation. Also, personal protective equipment (PPE) including eye and hearing protection should always be worn while operating any kind of machinery, whether power drill, saw or lawn mower.

“Every Soldier has PPE,” Reese said. “Remember to put it on at home just as you do at work.”

Keeping your home a haven from daily stresses is important especially in today’s fast-paced world. Identifying home hazards and taking the steps to mitigate the risks before anything tragic happens is a good way to keep your dwelling “home safe home.”

“There is life after work but if you have an accident at home because you were rushing or cutting corners, you are taking valuable time away from your friends, family and fun,” Reese said. “Remember, don’t take shortcuts, do your research, use a battle buddy and keep yourself safe at home.”

For more information about home safety, visit www.homesafetycouncil.org. For more information about the Army’s Safe Summer Campaign, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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Home Safety Checklist

Use bright lights at the top and bottom of stairs and make sure hallways and dark areas in the home are well-lit at night with nightlights.

Install grab bars in the tub, shower and near toilets.

Use a rubber bath mat or non-slip strips in the tub.

Wipe up spills and splashed bathwater promptly.

All stairs and steps need handrails along both sides, secured along the full length of the stairway. Keep stairs and pathways clear of clutter.

In homes with babies and toddlers, use baby gates at the top and bottom of stairs.

Check the setting of your water heater and make sure it's set no higher than 120 degrees F. Install smoke alarms on each level of your home—especially in or near sleeping areas.

Test each smoke alarm every month by pushing the test button until you hear a loud noise. Replace smoke alarm batteries with new ones at least once each year.

Know how to escape a fire. Find two exits out of every room – the door and possibly a window. Choose an outside meeting place in front of the home. Practice your plan twice a year with all members of the family. Stay in the kitchen while food is cooking on the stove.

Make sure an adult is in the room constantly while a candle is burning. Be sure to lock matches and lighters away from children.

Know the national poison control center toll-free number – (800) 222-1222 – and keep the number by every phone in the home.

Look around your home—under the sink, in the garage—for cleaning products and automotive fluids that say “Caution”, “Warning” or “Danger” on the label. Store these away from food, in locked cabinets out of sight and reach of children.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poison you can't see, smell or taste. CO is produced by fuel-burning appliances and equipment in your home. These need proper maintenance for safe use. Also install a carbon monoxide detector to alert you if the CO level becomes unsafe.

Install child locks on all cabinets—especially where potentially harmful items are stored.

Be sure cleaning products and other household substances have child-resistant closures.

Keep all medicines and vitamins in original containers in a secure area—away from children.

- Store dangerous chemicals such as pesticides, automotive fluids and paint thinner in a secure locked cabinet.
- Always store gasoline in an approved container.

Source: www.homesafetycouncil.org