

# SENIOR SAFETY AMBASSADOR HANDBOOK





# MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

## ■ Message from the Mayor

One of our City's most valuable resources is the older adult population. This vibrant and active segment of the population brings a richness to life in all of our neighborhoods.

But unfortunately, older adults can also become isolated and face dangers in their homes because of this isolation. Older adults are also too often targets of criminals and con artists.

By agreeing to be a Senior Safety Ambassador, you will be providing a valuable service to your older adult peers. This guide contains useful information regarding crime prevention, emergency preparedness and home safety that can help all of Chicago's older adults live free from fear and injury during their golden years.

I hope you find this information useful. Thank you for your commitment to the City of Chicago and to helping its older adult residents stay safe.

Sincerely,



Rahm Emanuel  
Mayor





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This handbook is designed to provide you with the tools you need to help your older adult peers, as well as other residents in your neighborhood be as safe as possible. From learning how to prevent becoming a victim of crime, to being prepared for emergency situations, to preventing falls and fires in the home, the information provided can prove to be an important resource for your community. While much of the information applies year-round, you should also be aware that some information will be more useful during certain seasons. For example, home improvement scams generally increase during the Spring, as residents begin to spend more time outside. Thefts from autos and pickpocketing tend to increase around the holidays, when more people are in stores and malls shopping for friends and relatives. Flooding is more likely in the summer, during storm season. And home fires also increase during the winter, when some residents turn to unsafe methods to stay warm.



# PERSONAL SAFETY

## ■ General Crime Prevention Tips

You're often told not to be a victim of crime. But you may wonder how to ensure that. While no one can guarantee your total safety, you can lessen the chance of being a victim by making it more difficult for a would-be thief or attacker.

### ***At Home – Don't be Surprised***

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- Keep your doors locked when home alone and lock your windows too when leaving the house for any long period of time. Lock your doors even if you are only planning to be away for a short time. Open doors and windows are an invitation that you don't want to send.
- Turn your porch lights on at night and illuminate your backyard to ensure that anyone lurking there will be easily detected.
- Most home burglaries occur when no one is at home. Burglars often enter through the less-visible back door. You can discourage burglars by putting a lock on your back gate, ensuring that your back door has a deadbolt lock and making sure that your back fence, trees or shrubs do not obscure the view of your home.
- Garages are a great convenience, but they also offer the opportunity for theft and a place to hide. Make your garage safer by installing good lighting at the back and over any side entrances, and secure stored property with a strong lock. An automatic garage door opener makes coming home safer, and light- or motion-sensitive lighting devices ensure that when you leave or come home, you won't be in the dark.
- If a crime is committed in the back of your property or if a criminal uses your property as an access to an alley, the police may not be able to identify the correct location unless your address is visible. The same is true in cases of fire or medical emergencies. The ability to find the right location quickly can make a difference. You should have your address permanently marked on the back of your property -- on the gate, the fence, or the garage. Don't rely on numbers on your garbage cans or other movable objects. While it makes it easy for you to find them, there is no guarantee they will always be in the right place.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

- Never let anyone that you don't know into your home. City and Utility company workers will almost never come to your home unless you have called for service. Always ask to see identification from anyone claiming to work for the City or a Utility company. Don't let individuals offering to do work on your home for a good price come into your home.
- If you are going to be away from home for several days, let a trusted friend or neighbor know you are going to be gone so they can keep an eye on your house. Have them check periodically to make sure packages that may have been delivered while you were gone aren't sitting on your porch.



## ***On the Street – Be Alert***

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- Make sure you are not an easy target for crime on the street. If you carry a purse, keep it in front of you and close to your body. You can do this by covering the flap or clasp with your hand or forearm. Never leave your purse in a shopping cart or on a counter while you pay for your purchases. Remember not to carry open-weave bags or purses without zippers or flaps. Those items are easy marks for pickpockets. If you carry a change purse or wallet, keep it in your front pants pocket or in the inside breast pocket of your coat. Always be alert when opening your purse or wallet.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

- Walk confidently, with your head up, and stay in well-lighted and well-traveled areas. Pay attention to people walking in front of and behind you. Pay particular attention when you are in crowded areas, such as buses and trains or malls and stores that are filled with other shoppers. Places with large crowds are favorites for thieves and pickpockets.
- Try to shop with friends or relatives. Not only is there safety in numbers, but shopping in a group will give you a chance to catch up on things and renew friendships.
- Never carry large amounts of money. Whenever possible, use debit or credit cards or checks instead of cash. When using debit or credit cards, make sure that only one slip is printed with your card.
- If you walk to and from work or public transit stations, particularly at night, use well-lit and populated streets. When possible, walk with friends and, if you can, vary the route you take each day or night.
- You should not use alleys as shortcuts, especially when alone and at night. Always use the more heavily traveled streets and sidewalks. While some alleys might seem more convenient, don't take the chance of making yourself a victim of crime.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Paratransit is provided for individuals whose disability or health condition may prevent them from using the CTA or Pace fixed route services for some or all of their travel. Individuals who are interested in using ADA Paratransit service must apply and be found eligible according to ADA guidelines. To request an application for ADA Paratransit call the RTA's ADA Paratransit Certification program at (312) 663-HELP or (312) 913-3122 (TTY) between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

## ***On Public Transit – Be Prepared***

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- Try to plan your trip in advance. When you are traveling on a new route, call the CTA and RTA information center at (312) 836-7000 for schedules for your bus or train.
- Have your exact fare or a fare card ready before you leave for your trip so you won't have to search for your money on the street or display extra cash.
- Avoid wearing expensive jewelry when you are riding public transportation.
- Try to use the busiest, best-lit stop possible both to get on and off the bus or train.
- When waiting for a train, stay close to other people in the most well-lit area of the station.
- When on the train or bus, sit near the driver or operator. Also find a seat on the aisle if possible; this will give you a good view of everything going on around you.
- Avoid sitting next to the door -- thieves may try to snatch jewelry or personal belongings from people near the door and exit quickly.
- Keep your purse, backpack, packages or other belongings in your lap or between your feet. Don't leave them sitting on an empty seat.
- Don't use your cell phone or other electronic devices like laptops or notebooks; these are the prime targets of robbers.
- Don't let yourself doze off on a bus or subway or become too wrapped up in a book or newspaper.
- Observe the behavior of the people around you. If you feel uneasy or threatened, change your seat or tell the conductor or driver.
- Be wary of noisy passengers arguing or causing other disturbances. This could be staged to distract you while others are trying to steal your belongings.

# PERSONAL SAFETY



## ***In Your Car – Secure Your Ride***

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- Lock your doors and be sure to store your purse, wallet or other valuables beneath your seat – not on the seat next to you where they are easy and inviting targets for theft.
- Park in a well lit area for the safety of your car and yourself and always lock your car.
- When you do your shopping remember to store your packages in the trunk of the car and not on the back seat. Also, if you take packages to the car but plan to return to the store or mall, drive your car to a new location within the parking lot. Criminals can be on the lookout for unsuspecting shoppers who simply drop their purchases into the trunk and then return to keep shopping.

## ***Going Home – Be Ready***

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- Always carry your keys in your hands so that you are ready to open the door.
- If you know you will be coming home after dark, make sure to leave some lights on.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

## ***Describing Suspicious Individuals:***

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You should always call 911 immediately to report suspicious people or activity in your neighborhood. Providing a detailed description of the people can help responding officers identify who they should stop and question about their activities. The more detailed the information, the better. Some of the things that you should try to remember are:

<b>Sex:</b>	Male or Female
<b>Race/Ethnicity:</b>	Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, etc
<b>Age:</b>	Estimate
<b>Height:</b>	Think of how tall they appear in comparison to yourself or of an object they are close to
<b>Weight:</b>	Estimate
<b>Build:</b>	Fat, husky, slim, muscular
<b>Face:</b>	Shape and color of eyes, nose, mouth, forehead, ears, texture of skin, eyebrows
<b>Hair:</b>	Color, texture, style, length. Beard, mustache, goatee
<b>Complexion:</b>	Color, pores, acne, razor rash, bumps, make-up
<b>Voice:</b>	Pitch, tone, speech impediments, other speech patterns or accent
<b>Other:</b>	Scars or other unusual marks, tattoos
<b>Clothing:</b>	Color, type of clothing, how it fits, branding, general appearance of clothing

# PERSONAL SAFETY

Here are some examples you can use to help friends and neighbors think about how to describe a suspicious person. Have them look briefly at each side of the picture and then try to remember as much about them as they can.

<b>SEX</b>	<b>RACE</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>HEIGHT</b>	<b>WEIGHT</b>	<b>WEAPON TYPE</b>
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<b>HAIR</b>		<b>HAT (color, type)</b>
<b>FACE</b>		<b>COAT</b>
<b>TATTOOS</b>		<b>SHIRT</b>
<b>COMPLEXION</b>		<b>BRANDS</b>
<b>SCARS/MARKS</b>		<b>PANTS</b>

<b>AUTO LICENSE, MAKE, COLOR</b>	<b>DIRECTION OF ESCAPE</b>
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# PERSONAL SAFETY

## ***Making the Right Call:***

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Sometimes it is as important to call the right number when reporting crimes or neighborhood conditions as making the call itself.

## **■ Calling 911**

- When calling 911, if you wish to remain anonymous, indicate that at the very beginning of your call.
- If you call 911 and do not get an immediate response, do not hang up and call again. This will only further delay your call. In the majority of cases, calls are answered on the first ring. However, during high volume periods, you may experience a slight delay. When all operators are busy, calls will be answered in the order they are received.
- Ambulances are sent for emergency situations only. Minor illnesses or routine medical visits will be referred to private ambulance services. The City does charge for ambulance services, but individuals will not be turned down solely on the basis that their insurance will not cover the cost.
- If you request an ambulance and the nearest one is over 18 blocks away, a Fire Department vehicle will be dispatched to your location to provide basic services until the paramedics arrive.
- Calls to the Police Department are answered on a priority basis. Situations that involve threat to life, bodily injury, or major property damage or loss are the highest priorities. Calls of this nature are normally responded to in 10 minutes or less.
- Second priorities include situations that are not life threatening, do not involve injuries or major destruction to property or the crime is no longer in progress. If your call falls under this category, the Police Department will respond as soon as possible.
- It is important to provide as much information on your situation as possible. Operators ask questions regarding the persons or autos involved in an accident. If you request an ambulance, the operator will inquire about your medical history. The more information you provide, the easier and faster it is for dispatchers to get services to you.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

- If you call 911 from a cellular phone, operators will ask your name, approximate location and the telephone number of your cellular phone. It is very important to give this information, because operators can not pick up your exact location on a cellular phone.

## ■ Calling 311

The principal functions of the 311 system are to provide information regarding City events and programs, receive requests for City services and forward them to the appropriate departments, make reports for non-emergency Police situations and serve as the back-up facility for the 911 Center.

- You should use 311 to report non-emergency police situations that do not involve a crime in progress or an immediate threat to life, bodily injury, or major property damage or loss. By using 311, residents help free up phone lines for true emergency calls and can help prevent and reduce crime by keeping more police officers on the street.

### **Some examples of calls that are appropriately directed to 311 include:**

- *If you wake up in the morning and realize your bicycle is missing from your garage.*
- *If you come out of the grocery store and realize the cell phone you left on the seat of your car is gone.*
- *If you hear your car alarm in the middle of the night and realize someone has tried to break in to it.*
- *If you receive an obscene phone call.*
- *If you discover graffiti or other damage to your home or business.*
- *If you discover you have received a forged check as payment.*

- You can call 311 to find out what Police District and beat you live in, as well as the date, time and location of your next beat meeting.
- 311 operators can tell you what political district (federal, state or municipal) you live in, as well as the address and telephone number of your Alderman, so you can forward your questions and/or concerns to them as well.
- 311 operators can provide the date, time and location of both citywide and neighborhood events, including parades, festivals, Chicago Public Library programs and more.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

- Residents of Chicago can call 311 to request numerous City services. Some of these services include the need for garbage cans (to prevent the presence of rats in a neighborhood), reporting stray animals that are a threat to the community, and towing abandoned vehicles. Those who find themselves homeless can call 311 to request information about shelters from the Department of Family and Support Services. Remember, it is important to relay as much information as possible to the operator so that the City can service you as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Finally, if you are unsure where to go for services and programs within the City of Chicago, or to which department you should direct your questions and/or concerns, 311 operators will be able to direct you to the appropriate parties.



## DID YOU KNOW?

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If you are calling 911 from the borders of Chicago using your cell phone, you may be connected to another 911 system. If this happens, tell the dispatcher you need Chicago 911 emergency and they will transfer you.

## ■ Identity Theft

Identity theft is the unauthorized use of personal information, such as a name, date of birth, or Social Security number, to commit financial fraud. It can encompass a number of crimes, from the unauthorized use of credit cards to a complete takeover of another person's name and financial accounts. An identity thief may use someone's personal identifiers to illegally obtain credit cards, open checking accounts, apply for loans, rent or purchase residences, establish services with utility companies, or engage in other fraudulent activity.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

## ■ Who Are the Victims of Identity Theft?

Identity theft can claim many victims. Credit grantors, such as banks and retail merchants, are victims when they finance the selling of goods and services that are not paid for. A person whose identity has been stolen is a victim, even if protected by insurance coverage or credit card reimbursement provisions. Although they may not have out-of-pocket losses, identity theft victims may suffer from injuries to their reputations, and may have to go through lengthy and often agonizing processes to reestablish credit.

## ■ How Does It Occur?

People who commit financial identity theft do not fit a stereotype. The offender may or may not be known to the victim, and the method of operation varies. Information may be obtained by searching through trash cans at banks, mortgage firms, social or credit agencies, public record agencies, obituaries, or residential garbage cans. Financial-related mail, such as credit statements, bank statements, or pre-approved credit card applications can be stolen from mailboxes. Identity thieves who work at car dealerships, mortgage houses, collection agencies, or utility services may have easy access to credit reports, and those employed as telephone marketers or mail clerks may have access to other financial information or documents. Information can sometimes be found on the Internet or through commercial databases that are accessed for a fee.

### ***Identity Theft Dos and Don'ts:***

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#### **DO**

- Protect your incoming and outgoing mail. Remove your mail from the box as soon as possible. If you believe that mail containing personal or financial information was opened or altered, notify the sender and stay alert for any suspicious activities, such as phone calls to verify your credit card numbers, loans, or bank accounts. If you are expecting a new or renewed credit card or other financial document by a certain date, watch the mail to be certain it arrives, and pursue the matter if it fails to arrive.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

- Shred or completely tear up any discarded paperwork that contains personal identifiers or financial information, including pre-approved credit card applications. If a vendor uses carbon copies for credit card bills, ask for and destroy the carbons. You can lessen your risk even further by discarding destroyed documents in separate garbage cans.
- Be aware of where your personal identification is kept and who has access to it. Protect your wallet and purse and never leave them unattended.
- Closely review your bills, including utility bills and bank statements, to ensure that all balances and receipts match and no activity is unaccounted for. If you do not get a statement or bill, find out why it is missing.
- If you have a computer, install software, available at most computer stores, that encrypts information you send in an e-mail. You can also ask your financial institution to add security to your accounts, such as special passwords.
- Stop pre-approved credit offers by calling all three credit reporting bureaus and opting out of the programs. By opting out, you receive fewer pre-approved loan and credit applications.

## DON'T

- Do not give out personal information in response to unsolicited offers by phone, mail, Internet, or in person. Criminals may pose as legitimate business people, charity workers, or law enforcement officers to gain your trust.
- Do not use your Social Security number unless you have to, including on your driver's license and checks. The Illinois Secretary of State allows drivers the option of not having their Social Security number on their driver's license.
- Do not fill out warranty cards for items you purchase or enter sweepstakes. Such information is often sold to others as a marketing tool.
- Personal identifiers, account numbers, and other private information should not be provided to anyone, unless you know the information will be secure.

# PERSONAL SAFETY



If you follow these steps, you will reduce your risk of being a victim of identity theft, but you can not completely eliminate the risk. Your goal should be to reduce other people's access to your information, so you should know what people and companies do with the information you give them. Keep these facts in mind:

- Know the person or company to whom you give information
- Ask what the person or company will do with the information
- Err on the side of caution—keep an eye on your financial picture, so if irregularities occur you will recognize them.

## ■ What to Do If You Are a Victim of Identify Theft:

If you have been victimized by identity theft, you should take certain steps to protect yourself and minimize the consequences. Correcting the damage to your credit rating and good name may be a tedious and time consuming process. As you speak to the contacts listed below, write down the names of the people you talk with, their positions, their responses, and the dates and times of your conversations. When sending correspondence through the mail, keep copies, and use registered mail with a return receipt requested. The post office can help you with the procedures for registered mail.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

The Chicago Police Department can take a report over the phone if you call 311, or you may go to the nearest District Station.

Once the report is made, it will take approximately two to five days for a detective from the appropriate Property Crimes Unit to be assigned to the case. Shortly thereafter the assigned Detective will contact you to start the follow-up investigation.

The Financial Crimes Investigations Unit of the Chicago Police Department investigates identity thefts of a complex and involved nature, and identity theft investigations are normally referred to this unit by one of the Property Crimes Units.

**Next, contact the three credit reporting agencies:**

**Experian [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)**

1-888-Experian (397-3742)

**Equifax Fraud Victim [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)**

1-800-525-6285

**TransUnion Fraud [www.tuc.com](http://www.tuc.com)**

1-800-680-7289

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Privacy Rights Clearinghouse at 619-298-3396 offers tips for resolving problems associated with financial fraud.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

## When speaking with these agencies:

- Notify them of the identity theft.
- Request a copy of your credit report from each bureau.
- Request that a “hawk” alert/fraud alert be placed on your credit report.
- Request that all inquiries on your credit report be reported to you.
- After viewing your credit report, contact all banks, credit card companies, etc. where fraudulent credit has been established.
- File affidavits of forgery with all banks/creditors where credit has been established. Contact the bank or creditor for procedures on how this is done.
- Request copies of your credit report every six months until your credit is clear.
- Request that a consumer statement be placed on your report (this request may have to be in writing). A consumer statement is an explanation of your credit problems.
- Contact all the utility companies that provide service to you to ensure that no other accounts are applied for or established in your name. The companies would include, gas, electricity, cable, water (City of Chicago), phone (cellular companies, as well as standard phone), etc.

Contact the companies first by telephone and send a letter to each company by registered mail with a return receipt, giving your name and your authorized accounts. Be sure to state that no other accounts in your name are authorized. The easiest way to do this is to create a form letter, with your name and address where the addressee and account number can be inserted as appropriate. Also, use personal ID numbers whenever possible to activate your accounts.

## ■ Other Financial Scams

### **Phishing Scams**

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“Phishing” is the use of fraudulent e-mail designed to steal identities as well as vital personal information such as credit card numbers, bank account PINs, and passwords. Phishing e-mails often ask you to verify this type of information. Scammers also go “SMishing,” or phishing using text messages, by asking you to verify or confirm sensitive information. Legitimate companies never ask for your password or account number via e-mail. Protect yourself:

# PERSONAL SAFETY

- Call the company directly to determine if the email is trustworthy.
- Forward the email to the Federal Trade Commission at [spam@uce.gov](mailto:spam@uce.gov).
- Do not reveal personal or financial information in emails.
- Contact the company directly. Do not use contact information provided on a web site connected to the request; instead, use contact information from account statements that you already have.
- Don't reply to the email, even if it threatens to disable your account.
- Call 911

## **Cash Top-Up Scams**

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Cash top-up cards can be a convenient way to transfer money to other accounts. They are not designed to be used directly with retailers or online merchants; rather they are used to reload money on accounts that you control, such as your debit card. Unfortunately, scammers know the ease and convenience of using these cards. They persuade you to share your top-up card number directly with them instead of using a wire or escrow service. However, if you send the top-up number you'll be left without the merchandise you were promised or your money. To protect yourself from these scams:

- Guard your top-up card like it is cash.
- Be wary of advertisements where you are asked to pay with a cash top-up card.
- Don't share your top-up card number with someone you don't know, even if a merchant asks you to e-mail it to them.
- Never use these cards to pay taxes or fees on lottery or sweepstakes winnings. It's likely that you haven't won anything.



# PERSONAL SAFETY

## **Protect Your PIN**

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Beware of “shoulder surfers.” Be suspicious of anyone lurking around an ATM or watching over your shoulder while you use your card. Some thieves even put a device over the card slot of an ATM to read the magnetic strip and record your PIN; this is known as “skimming”. If you suspect criminal activity, walk away and use a different ATM.

## **Investment Scams**

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Deceptive pitches for investments often misrepresent or leave out facts in order to promote fantastic profits with little risk. No investment is risk-free and a high rate of return means greater risk. Before investing, get written information such as a prospectus or annual report. Beware if a salesperson:

- Encourages you to borrow money or cash in retirement funds to invest;
- Pressures you to invest immediately;
- Promises quick profits;
- Says that the disclosure documents required by Federal law are just a formality;
- Tells you to write false information on your account form;
- Sends material with typos or misspellings or not printed on letterhead;
- Offers to share inside information;
- Uses words like “guarantee”, “high return”, “limited offer”, or “as safe as a CD”;
- Uses the phrase “this investment is IRA-approved”; or
- Claims that “off-shore investments are tax-free and confidential.”

## **Caller ID Spoofing**

Scammers have adopted the practice of caller ID spoofing to obtain personal information from consumers. In this fraud, someone calls you using a false name and phone number for the Caller ID screen. During the call, the scammer describes an urgent scenario, such as the cancellation of an account. The caller may say you can avoid the cancellation if you provide your bank account or credit card number to pay the company. If you give the sensitive information, he can use it to steal your identity, or use your bank accounts. Don't give out personal information on an incoming call. Hang up and call the customer service phone number printed on your statement, the company's website or in the phonebook.

# PERSONAL SAFETY

You can report caller ID spoofers to the Federal Communications Commission online or at 1-888-225-5322.

## **Free Grants**

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Sometimes, it's an ad that claims you will qualify to receive a "free grant" to pay for education costs, home repairs, home business expenses, or unpaid bills. Other times, it's a phone call supposedly from a "government" agency or some other organization with an official sounding name. In either case, the claim is the same: your application for a grant is guaranteed to be accepted, and you'll never have to pay the money back. But "money for nothing" grant offers usually are scams, whether you see them in your local paper or a national magazine, or hear about them on the phone. Grant scammers generally follow a script: they congratulate you on your eligibility, then ask for your checking account information so they can "deposit your grant directly into your account," or cover a one-time "processing fee." The caller may even reassure you that you can get a refund if you're not satisfied. In fact, you'll never see the grant they promise; they will disappear with your money.

## **Medicare Scams**

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This scheme is called the "\$299 Ring" for the typical amount of money Medicare beneficiaries are talked into withdrawing from their checking accounts to pay for a non-existent prescription drug plan. No Medicare drug plan can ask a person with Medicare for bank account or other personal information over the telephone. No beneficiary should ever provide that kind of information to a caller. In addition, legitimate Medicare drug plans will not ask for payment over the telephone or the Internet. They must bill the beneficiary for the monthly premium. Typically, that amount is set up as an automatic withdrawal from the beneficiary's monthly Social Security check. Beneficiaries may also opt to pay the monthly premiums in other ways such as writing a check or setting up automatic payments from their checking accounts. Whenever you have a question or concern about any activity regarding Medicare, call 1-800-MEDICARE.

# PERSONAL SAFETY



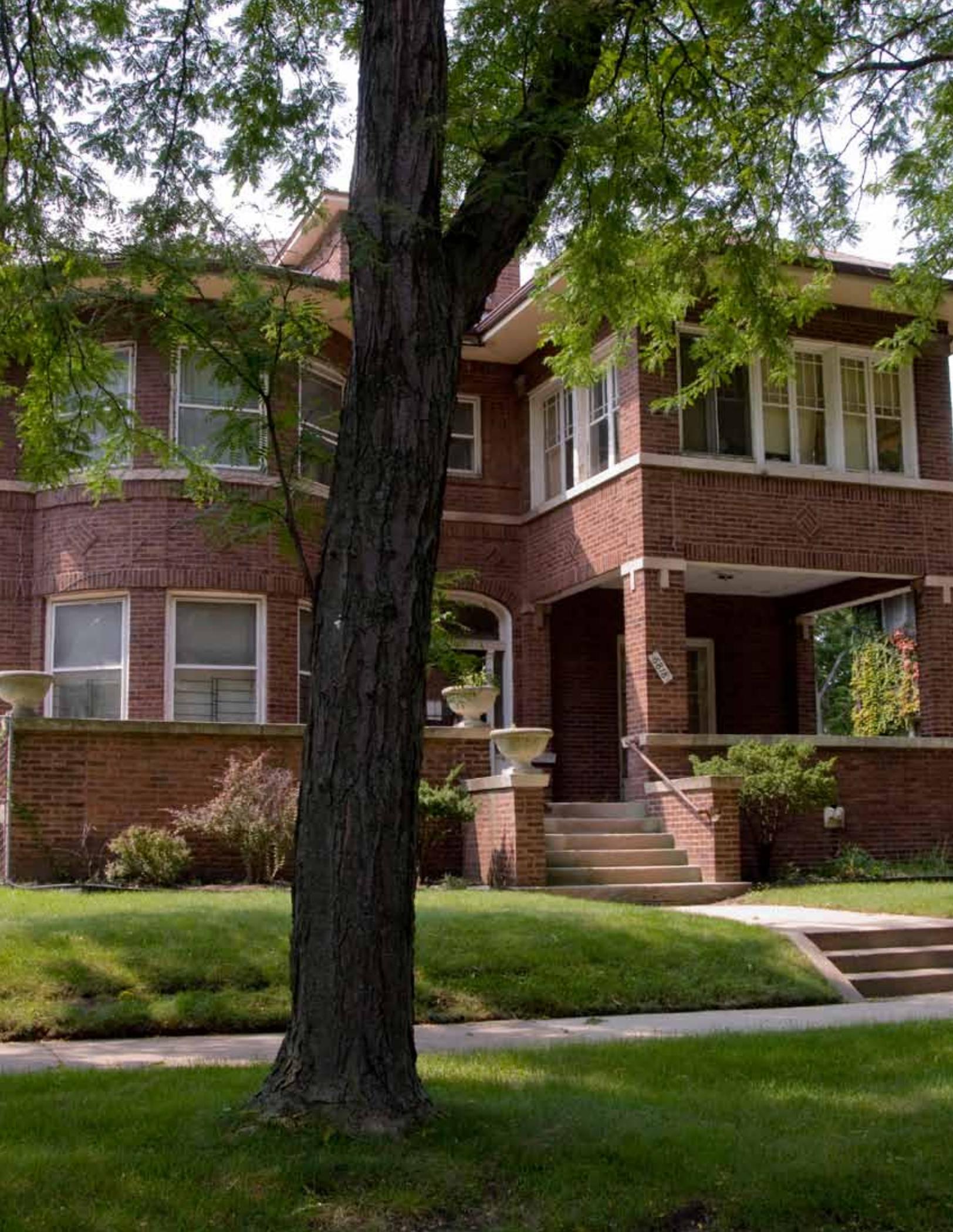
## ***Grandparent Scam***

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Well-meaning older adults who think they are helping a grandchild in distress are becoming victims of the so-called “Grandparent Scam.” Typically, the grandparent receives a frantic phone call from someone they are led to believe is their grandchild. A scammer, posing as their grandchild, explains that he or she has gotten into trouble—often in Canada—and needs their help. The “grandchild” might claim he or she caused a car accident or was arrested for drug possession. Victims may also be contacted by someone claiming to be a police officer or lawyer representing the grandchild in court.

The “grandchild” pleads to the grandparents to not tell his or her parents and asks that they wire thousands of dollars for reasons including posting bail, repairing the grandchild’s car, covering lawyer’s fees or even paying hospital bills for a person the grandchild injured in a car accident.

If you receive a call from someone claiming to be your grandchild in distress, don’t disclose any information before you have confirmed it really is your grandchild. If a caller says “It’s me, grandma!” don’t respond with a name but instead let the caller explain who he or she is. One easy way to confirm their identity is to ask a simple question that your grandchild would know such as what school he or she goes to or their middle name.



# PREPAREDNESS

## ■ General Emergency Preparedness

The City of Chicago wants you to be prepared for an emergency. Here is what you need to have in your head, in your home and in your hand. Planning now and knowing what to do will make it easier for you and your family if an emergency occurs. Create an emergency plan while at home, work or on the go. Here are tips to help you and your family become better prepared for an emergency.

- 1.** Take a moment to imagine that there is an emergency, like a fire in your home, and you need to leave quickly. What are the best escape routes from your home? Find at least two ways out of each room. Now, write it down - you've got the beginning of a plan.
- 2.** Pick a place to meet after a disaster. Designate two meeting places. Choose one right outside your home, in case of a sudden household emergency, such as a fire. The second place you choose needs to be outside your neighborhood, in the event that it is not safe to stay near or return to your home.
- 3.** Choose an emergency contact person outside your area because it may be easier to call long distance than locally after a local/regional disaster. Take a minute now to call or e-mail an out-of-town friend or family member to ask him or her to be your family's designated contact in the event of an emergency. Be sure to share the contact's phone number with everyone in the family. During an emergency, you can call your contact who can share with other family members where you are, how you are doing, and how to get in contact with you.
- 4.** Complete an emergency contact card and make copies for each member of your family to carry with them. Be sure to include your out-of-town contact on your contact card. It may be easier to reach someone out of town if local phone lines are out of service or overloaded. You should also have at least one traditionally wired landline phone, as cordless or cellular phones may not work in an emergency. Visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) for sample emergency contact cards.

# PREPAREDNESS

**5.** Dogs may be man's best friend, but due to health regulations, most emergency shelters cannot house animals. Find out in advance how to care for your pets and working animals when disaster strikes. Pets should not be left behind, but could be taken to a veterinary office, family member's home or animal shelter during an emergency. Also be sure to store extra food and water for pets. For more information, visit the Animal Safety section on [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or visit the Humane Society Web site at [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)

**6.** Go through your calendar now, and put a reminder on it - every six months - to review your plan, update numbers, and check supplies to be sure nothing has expired, spoiled, or changed. Also remember to practice your tornado, fire escape or other disaster plans.

**7.** Teach your grandchildren how and when to call 911 for help. Post these and other emergency telephone numbers by telephones.

**8.** Conduct fire drills and practice evacuating your home twice a year. Drive your planned evacuation route and plot alternate routes on a map in case main roads are blocked or gridlocked. Commit a weekend to update telephone numbers, emergency supplies and review your plan with everyone.

**9.** A community working together during an emergency makes sense. Sharing plans and communicating in advance is a good strategy

- Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together during an emergency.
- Find out if anyone has specialized equipment like a power generator, or expertise such as medical knowledge, that might help in a crisis.
- Decide who will check on elderly or disabled neighbors.
- If you care for grandchildren, make back-up plans for their care in case you can't get home in an emergency.

# PREPAREDNESS

**10.** What if disaster strikes while you're at work? Do you know the emergency preparedness plan for your workplace? While many companies have been more alert and pro-active in preparing for disasters of all types since the September 11, 2001 attacks, a national survey indicates that many employees still don't know what their workplace plan is for major or minor disasters. If you don't know yours, make a point to ask. Know multiple ways to exit your building, participate in workplace evacuation drills, and consider keeping some emergency supplies at the office. Visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) and click on Ready Business for more information about business preparedness.



**11.** You should keep enough supplies in your home to meet the needs of your family for at least three days. Build an emergency supply kit to take with you in an evacuation. The basics to stock in your portable kit include: water, food, battery-powered radio and flashlight with extra batteries, first aid supplies, change of clothing, blanket or sleeping bag, wrench or pliers, whistle, dust mask, plastic sheeting and duct tape, trash bags, map, a manual can opener for canned food and special items for infants, elderly, the sick or people with disabilities. Keep these items in an easy to carry container such as a covered trash container, a large backpack, or a duffle bag.

# PREPAREDNESS

**12.** Preparing for emergencies needn't be expensive if you're thinking ahead and buying small quantities at a time. Make a list of some foods that:

- Have a long shelf-life and will not spoil.
- You and your family like.
- Do not require cooking.
- Can be easily stored.
- Have a low salt content as salty foods will make you more thirsty.

Keep the list in your purse or wallet and pick up a few items each time you're shopping and/or see a sale until you have built up a well-stocked supply that can sustain each member of your family for at least three days following an emergency.

**13.** Take a minute to check your family's first aid kit, and note any depleted items - then, add them to your shopping list. Don't have a first aid kit? Add that to the list or build a kit yourself. Just add the following items to your shopping list and assemble a first aid kit. Consider creating a kit for each vehicle as well.

- (20) adhesive bandages of various sizes
- (1) 5" x 9" sterile dressing
- (1) conforming roller gauze bandage
- (2) triangular bandages
- (2) 3" x 3" sterile gauze pads
- (2) 4" x 4" sterile gauze pads
- (1) roll 3" cohesive bandage
- (2) germicidal hand wipes or waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- (6) antiseptic wipes
- (2) pair large medical grade non-latex gloves
- Adhesive tape, 2" width
- Anti-bacterial ointment
- Cold pack
- Scissors (small, personal)
- Tweezers
- CPR breathing barrier, such as a face shield
- First Aid Manual

# PREPAREDNESS



## DID YOU KNOW?

Improperly disposing of prescription and non-prescription drugs is hazardous to the health and environment of the City. There are drug collection boxes in all Police Department district stations. If you know someone who can't get out regularly, you can take their unwanted medications along with yours when you drop them off.

### Non-Prescription and Prescription Drugs

- Aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antacid (for stomach upset)
- Syrup of Ipecac (use to induce vomiting if advised by the Poison Control Center)
- Laxative
- Activated charcoal (use if advised by the Poison Control Center)
- Prescription drugs, as recommended by your physician, and copies of the prescriptions in case they need to be replaced

**14.** Keep at least a three-day supply of water per person. Store a minimum of one gallon of water per person per day (two quarts for drinking, two quarts for food preparation and sanitation). Store water in plastic containers such as soft drink bottles. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles. A normally active person needs to drink at least two quarts of water each day. Hot environments and strenuous activity can double that amount. Children, nursing mothers, and people who are sick will also need more.

# PREPAREDNESS

**15.** One of the easiest ways you can prepare for emergencies is to keep some tools and supplies readily available. Every kit is unique and can be tailored to meet the specific needs of your family, but this is a general list of supplies you may want to consider:

- Mess kits, or paper cups, plates, and plastic utensils
- Emergency preparedness manual and a copy of your disaster plan, including your emergency contacts list
- Battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Cash or traveler's checks, change
- Non-electric can opener, utility knife
- Tube tent
- Duct Tape
- Compass
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic storage containers
- Signal flare
- Paper, pencil
- Needles, thread
- Medicine dropper
- Shut-off wrench or pliers, to turn off household gas and water
- Whistle
- Plastic sheeting
- Map of the area (for locating shelters and evacuation routes)

**16.** Also include items for sanitation in your emergency kit. Consider the following:

- Toilet paper, towelettes
- Soap, liquid detergent
- Feminine supplies
- Personal hygiene items
- Plastic garbage bags, ties (for personal sanitation uses)
- Plastic bucket with tight lid
- Disinfectant
- Household chlorine bleach

# PREPAREDNESS

**17.** Include at least one complete change of clothing and footwear per person in your emergency supply kit. We suggest long pants and long sleeves for additional protection after a disaster.

- Sturdy shoes or work boots
- Rain gear
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Hat and gloves
- Thermal underwear
- Sunglasses

**18.** You should also keep a smaller version of your emergency supply kit in your vehicle, in case you are commuting or traveling when disaster strikes. The emergency kit for your vehicle should include:

- Bottled water and non-perishable high energy foods, such as granola bars, raisins and peanut butter
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Blanket
- Booster cables
- Fire extinguisher (5 lb., A-B-C type)
- First aid kit and manual
- Maps
- Shovel
- Tire repair kit and pump
- Flares or other emergency marking devices

**19.** When water is of questionable purity, it is easiest to use bottled water for drinking and cooking if it is available. When it's not available, it is important to know how to treat contaminated water. In addition to having a bad odor and taste, water from questionable sources may be contaminated by a variety of microorganisms, including bacteria and parasites that cause diseases such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis. All water of uncertain purity should be treated before use. Use one or a combination of these treatments:

# PREPAREDNESS



- Filter: Filter the water using a piece of cloth or coffee filter to remove solid particles.
- Boil: Bring it to a rolling boil for about one full minute. Cool it and pour it back and forth between two clean containers to improve its taste before drinking it.
- Chlorinate:
  - Add 16 drops (1/8 teaspoon) of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Stir to mix. Sodium hypochlorite of the concentration of 5.25% to 6% should be the only active ingredient in the bleach. There should not be any added soap or fragrances. A major bleach manufacturer has also added Sodium Hydroxide as an active ingredient, which they state does not pose a health risk for water treatment.
  - Let stand 30 minutes.
  - If it smells of chlorine, you can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, add 16 more drops (1/8 teaspoon) of chlorine bleach per gallon of water, let stand 30 minutes, and smell it again. If it smells of chlorine, you can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, discard it and find another source of water.

Flood water can also be contaminated by toxic chemicals. Do NOT try to treat flood water.

# PREPAREDNESS

**20.** In some emergencies you may be required to turn off your utilities. To prepare for this type of event:

- Locate the electric, gas and water shut-off valves. If you turn off the gas, a professional must turn it back on. Do not attempt to do this yourself.
- Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves.
- Teach adult family members how to turn off utilities.

**21.** Understand that during an emergency you may be asked to “shelter-in-place” or evacuate. Plan for both possibilities and be prepared to listen to instructions from your local emergency management officials. Visit [Ready.gov](http://Ready.gov) and [www.redcross.org/preparedness](http://www.redcross.org/preparedness) for more information on sheltering-in-place.

**22.** A disaster can cause significant financial loss. Your apartment or home may be severely damaged or destroyed. You may be forced to live in temporary housing. Income may be cut off or significantly reduced. Important financial records could be destroyed. Take the time now to assess your situation and ask questions. To help you, consider using the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK), a tool developed by Operation Hope, FEMA and Citizen Corps or contact your local Red Cross chapter for Disasters and Financial Planning: A Guide for Preparedness.

**23.** Floods are among the most frequent and costly natural disasters in terms of human hardship and economic loss. As much as 90 percent of the damage related to all natural disasters (excluding draught) is caused by floods and associated debris flow. Most communities in the United States can experience some kind of flooding. Melting snow can combine with rain in the winter and early spring; severe thunderstorms can bring heavy rain in the spring or summer; or hurricanes can bring intense rainfall to coastal and inland states in the summer and fall. Regardless of how a flood occurs, the rule for being safe is simple: head for higher ground and stay away from floodwater. Even a shallow depth of fast-moving floodwater produces more force than most people imagine. You can protect yourself by being prepared and having time to act. Local radio or television stations or a NOAA Weather Radio are the best sources of information in a flood situation.

# PREPAREDNESS

**24.** When there is concern about a potential exposure to a chemical or other airborne hazard, local officials may advise you to “shelter-in-place” and “seal the room”. This is different from taking shelter on the lowest level of your home in case of a natural disaster like a tornado. If you believe the air may be badly contaminated or if you are instructed by local officials, follow the instructions below to create a temporary barrier between you and the contaminated air outside.

## **To shelter-in-place and seal-the-room:**

- Close and lock all windows and exterior doors.
- Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems.
- Close the fireplace damper.
- Get your disaster supplies kit and turn on your battery-powered radio.
- Go to an interior room that is above ground level and without windows, if possible. In the case of a chemical threat, an above-ground location is preferable because some chemicals are heavier than air, and may seep into basements even if the windows are closed.
- If directed by local authorities on the radio, use duct tape to seal all cracks around the door and any vents into the room. Tape plastic sheeting, such as heavy-duty plastic garbage bags, over any windows.
- Listen to your radio or television for further instructions. Local officials will tell you when you can leave the room in which you are sheltering, or they may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community.

**25.** If there is an explosion:

- Take shelter against your desk or a sturdy table.
- Exit the building immediately.
- Do not use elevators.
- Check for fire and other hazards.
- Take your emergency supply kit if time allows.

# PREPAREDNESS

**26.** Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. Most likely local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or a wave of sick people seeking medical attention. The best source of information will be radio or television reports. Understand that some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from other people. In the event of a biological attack, public health officials may not immediately be able to provide information on what you should do. It will take time to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated, and who may have been exposed. You should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news including the following:

- Are you in the group or area authorities believe may have been exposed?
- What are the signs and symptoms of the disease?
- Are medications or vaccines being distributed?
- Where? Who should get them and how?
- Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?



# PREPAREDNESS

## **During a declared biological emergency:**

- If a family member becomes sick, it is important to be suspicious.
- Do not assume, however, that you should go to a hospital emergency room or that any illness is the result of the biological attack. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap.
- Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs, and seek medical advice.
- Consider if you are in the group or area authorities believe to be in danger.
- If your symptoms match those described and you are in the group considered at risk, immediately seek emergency medical attention.

## **If you are potentially exposed:**

- Follow instructions of doctors and other public health officials.
- If the disease is contagious expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment. You may be advised to stay away from others or even be deliberately quarantined.
- For non-contagious diseases, expect to receive medical evaluation and treatment.

## **If you become aware of an unusual or suspicious substance nearby:**

- Quickly get away.
- Protect yourself. Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow breathing. Examples include two to three layers of cotton such as a t-shirt, handkerchief or towel. Otherwise, several layers of tissue or paper towels may help.
- Wash with soap and water.
- Contact authorities.
- Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet for official news and information including what the signs and symptoms of the disease are, if medications or vaccinations are being distributed and where you should seek medical attention if you become sick.
- If you become sick seek emergency medical attention.

# PREPAREDNESS

## ■ Summer Preparedness

During the summer months, temperatures in Chicago can reach dangerous levels. Besides discomfort, extremely high temperatures, especially when combined with high humidity, can pose serious harm to your personal health. Extremely high temperatures can be particularly hazardous for children, older adults, those with special needs, and pets. It is important to treat extreme heat temperatures as you would any other emergency. This means being personally prepared whether you are at home, work, or on-the-go.

### Know What's "Hot"

#### Heat Watch:

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The National Weather Service will issue a Heat Watch if any of the following conditions are forecast to occur in the near future:

- 3 consecutive days with the Heat Index at 100-104 degrees.
- 2 consecutive days with the Heat Index at 105-109 degrees.
- A single day with the Heat Index at 110 degrees or higher.

#### Heat Warning:

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The National Weather Service will issue a Heat Warning when Heat Index ranges listed above are occurring or imminent.

#### Heat Index:

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The heat index combines air temperature and humidity to determine an apparent temperature.

# PREPAREDNESS

## Heat Related Injuries and Treatment

Heat Cramps – Heat cramps usually affect people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture. The low salt level in the muscles may be the cause of heat cramps. Symptoms include:

- Muscle pains or spasms usually in the abdomen, arms, legs
- Nausea and/or fatigue

If you have heart problems or are on a low-sodium diet, you should seek medical attention. Otherwise, stop all activity and sit in a cool place, drink clear juice or a sports beverage, and avoid strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside. Seek medical attention if cramps do not subside after 1 hour.

### *Heat Exhaustion*

Heat exhaustion can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are older adults, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. Symptoms include:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

To combat the effects of heat exhaustion, drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages, rest in an air-conditioned environment if possible, take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath and wear lightweight clothing.

# PREPAREDNESS

## *Heat or Sun Stroke*

Heat or sun stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided. Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- A body temperature above 103° F, orally
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness
- Uncontrollable muscle twitching



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

One of the best ways to beat the heat is to stay indoors in an air-conditioned place. If you or others you know have limited access to air-conditioning, you may consider taking refuge in area shopping malls or public facilities. The City also makes public buildings such as police stations, libraries, park facilities, and Department regional senior centers available as Cooling Centers. To find the nearest police station, library, park field house, pool, or senior regional center, contact 311.

If someone is suffering from heat stroke, call 911 for immediate medical assistance. Lay the victim in a shady area and try to cool the victim rapidly using whatever methods you can. Monitor body temperature, and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102 F. Do not give the victim fluids – most people with heat stroke have an altered mental status and cannot safely be given fluids to drink.

# PREPAREDNESS

## Staying Healthy in the Heat

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People suffer from heat-related illnesses when their bodies are unable to properly cool. Under normal conditions, the body produces sweat that evaporates and cools the body. In high heat and humidity, however, evaporation is slowed and the body must work extra hard to maintain its normal temperature. Here are some common sense tips for handling the heat.

- Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages, coffee and soft drinks.
- Stay indoors and, when possible, stay in an air-conditioned place.
- Take cool baths or showers; use cool towels.
- Wear loose, light cotton clothing.
- Avoid preparing and eating heavy meals and using cooking ovens.
- Avoid or minimize physical exertion.
- Do not let anyone sit in a hot, parked car, even for a few minutes.

*If you must be out in the heat:*

- Limit your outdoor activity to early morning and evening hours.
- Cut down on exercise. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour.
- Try to rest often in shady areas.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses and by putting on sunscreen.

## Keeping Your Home Cool

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- Inspect or install additional insulation – inspect the insulation between heated and unheated areas (e.g. garage, attic, crawl space) to ensure insulation is at least 6 inches thick. Insulation helps to keep heat out in the summer as well as to keep heat in during the winter months.
- Use ceiling fans – because heat rises, ceiling fans can help clear the hottest air from the home. Be sure that the fan blades are rotating clockwise.

# PREPAREDNESS

- Landscape – plant trees or shrubs to shade air conditioning units, but do not block the airflow or plant near power lines. A unit operating in the shade uses less electricity. According to the Department of Energy, just three trees, properly placed around a house, can save between \$100 and \$250 annually in cooling and heating costs. Daytime air temperatures can be 3 to 6 degrees cooler in tree-shaded neighborhoods.
- Keep electric lights off or turned down.
- Keep shades drawn and blinds closed, but windows slightly open.

## Power Outages

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Power outages can severely impact the welfare and safety of Chicagoans. While the City often experiences outages of limited duration throughout the year, a large-scale power outage is most likely to occur during summer months, when temperatures are at an extreme and electricity is in great demand

### If an outage occurs:

- Turn off all appliances including your furnace, water heater, and water pump. This is to help you avoid a circuit overload once power is restored.
- Leave on one lamp to know when power has been restored.
- Report power outages by calling ComEd at 1-800-EDISON-1 (1-800-334-7661). When calling to report a power outage, a ticket for service is generated and crews are dispatched to restore power based on calls received.
- Do not touch downed wires.
- Keep freezer and refrigerator doors closed and open them only when necessary. Food will stay frozen for 36 to 48 hours in a fully loaded freezer, if you keep the door closed. A half full freezer will generally keep food frozen for 24 hours.
- If you rely on electric medical equipment, such as wheelchairs, ventilators, and oxygen compressors, plan ahead by talking to your medical supply company about getting batteries or a generator as a backup power source.

# PREPAREDNESS

## ■ Winter Preparedness

Chicago's winters will bring snow or subfreezing temperatures, as well as strong winds or even ice or heavy rain storms. Are you ready? One of the primary concerns is the winter weather's ability to knock out heat, power and communications services to your home or office, sometimes for days at a time. The National Weather Service refers to winter storms as the "Deceptive Killers" because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Instead, people die in traffic accidents on icy roads and of hypothermia from prolonged exposure to cold. It is important to be prepared for winter weather before it strikes.

### DID YOU KNOW?

To be advised by the City when extreme weather is expected, visit [www.alertchicago.com](http://www.alertchicago.com) or call 311 to sign up yourself, a friend, or a neighbor for the Extreme Weather Notification System. Registered members will receive a recorded phone message noting official warnings and available City services.

**There are several steps you can take to be prepared for the winter.**

- Thoroughly check and update your family's emergency supply kit before winter approaches and add the following supplies in preparation for winter weather:
  - Rock salt to melt ice on walkways.
  - Sand to improve traction.
  - Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
  - Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.

# PREPAREDNESS

- Prepare Your Home:

- Make sure your home is well insulated and that you have weather stripping around your doors and windowsills to keep the warm air inside.
- Insulate pipes with insulation or newspapers and plastic and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.
- Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- Hire a contractor to check the structural stability of the roof to sustain unusually heavy weight from the accumulation of snow or water, if drains on flat roofs do not work.

- If you have a car, fill the gas tank in case you have to leave. In addition, check or have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- Antifreeze levels – ensure they are sufficient to avoid freezing.
- Battery and ignition system – should be in top condition and battery terminals should be clean.
- Brakes – check for wear and fluid levels.
- Exhaust system – check for leaks and crimped pipes and repair or replace as necessary. Carbon monoxide is deadly and usually gives no warning.
- Fuel and air filters – replace and keep water out of the system by using additives and maintaining a full tank of gas.
- Heater and defroster – ensure they work properly.
- Lights and flashing hazard lights – check for serviceability.
- Oil – check for level and weight. Heavier oils congeal more at low temperatures and do not lubricate as well.
- Thermostat – ensure it works properly.
- Tires – make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions.
- Windshield wiper equipment – repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.

# PREPAREDNESS



## DID YOU KNOW?

If you are concerned about a relative, friend or neighbor and can't make contact with them, you can call 311 and request a well-being check. Trained outreach workers from the Department of Family and Support Service conduct the checks and can evaluate housing conditions, safety hazards, health and abuse issues and other potential problems and if necessary, call in other social services or medical professionals.

- Familiarize yourself with the terms that are used to identify winter weather
  - Freezing rain creates a coating of ice on roads and walkways.
  - Sleet is rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes sidewalks and roads to freeze and become slippery.
  - Winter Weather Advisory means cold, ice and snow are expected.
  - Winter Storm Watch means severe weather such as heavy snow or ice is possible in the next day or two.
  - Winter Storm Warning means severe winter conditions have begun or will begin very soon.
  - Blizzard Warning means heavy snow and strong winds will produce a blinding snow, near zero visibility, deep drifts and life-threatening wind chill.
  - Frost/Freeze Warning means below freezing temperatures are expected.
- When a Winter Storm Watch is issued:
  - Listen to NOAA Weather Radio, local radio, and television stations, or cable television stations such as The Weather Channel for further updates.
  - Be alert to changing weather conditions.
  - Avoid unnecessary travel.

# PREPAREDNESS

- When a Winter Storm Warning is issued:
  - Stay indoors during the storm.
  - If you must go outside, several layers of lightweight clothing will keep you warmer than a single heavy coat. Gloves or mittens and a hat will prevent loss of body heat. Cover your mouth to protect your lungs. Walk carefully on snowy, icy walkways.
  - If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
  - Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects.
  - Avoid traveling by car in a storm, but if you must, carry an emergency supply kit in the trunk and let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
  - Eat regularly and drink ample fluids, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
  - Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.



## DID YOU KNOW?

If a lease requires the landlord to provide heat, from September 15 to June 1 the temperature inside the rental unit must be at least 68 degrees during the day and at least 66 degrees during the evening. If you know of an older adult whose landlord is not maintaining these temperatures, call 311.



## ■ Ten Steps to Fire Safety

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### 1. Smoke Alarms

- Are required by law
- Check the batteries monthly
- Change the batteries in the Spring and Fall when you change your clocks
- Place one on every floor, near stairwells, near bedrooms

### 2. Escape Plan

- Make sure there are two exits out of every major room in the house
- Designate a meeting place to go to in case of emergency or fire

### 3. Close Bedroom Doors

- A closed bedroom door will keep out smoke and fire for up to 20 minutes

### 4. Roll Out of Bed

- When you hear or see the smoke alarm, roll out of bed and crawl under the smoke
- Crawl outside to your meeting place

### 5. What Not to Do

- Never hide
- Never waste time grabbing valuables
- Never try to save any pets
- Never use elevators

### 6. Know Two Ways Out

- Exit a door first
- If door is hot, do not open it. Find another exit, like another door or window
- If using a window as a 2nd exit, climb out only if it is on first floor
- If it is on the second floor or higher, blow a whistle, scream and wave a pillow case or shirt for attention

# HOME SAFETY



## 7. Feel the Door

- Feel the door first with the back of your hand
- If the door is hot, do not open it – use your second exit
- If the door is not hot, open it slowly and peek out
- If the path is clear of fire and smoke, exit

## 8. Do Not Go Back In – Go to Your Meeting Place

- Tell a fireman if someone is still in the building

## 9. Call 911

- From your meeting place, determine if everyone is out of the building, then call 911

## 10. Practice Your Escape Plan

- Run through your escape plan once a month until you are comfortable with it
- After that, run through your escape plan every 6 months

## **Smoke Detectors and Home Escape Planning:**

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Most fires occur at night when people are sleeping. A smoke detector can alert you when there is a fire, in time to save your life. Smoke detectors work by sensing rising smoke from a fire and sounding an alarm.

## **What Type of Smoke Detectors Are There?**

- Photoelectric detectors use a photoelectric bulb that emits a beam of light. When smoke enters, light from the beam is reflected from smoke particles into a photocell and the alarm is triggered.
- Ionization Chamber detectors contain a small, safe radiation chamber source that produces electrically charged air molecules called ions. When smoke enters the chamber, it causes a change in the flow of ions, triggering the alarm.

Both are equally effective and neither requires that you be familiar with its inner workings. As long as you buy a detector that is tested by a major testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), you can be assured it has met certain testing requirements.

## **Where Should I Install My Detector?**

Smoke rises, so the best place to install a detector is on the ceiling or high on an inside wall just below the ceiling. If the detector is below an un-insulated attic or in a mobile home, the detector should be placed on the wall 4" -12" below the ceiling. In a multi-level home, a detector is needed on each level. On the first floor it should be placed on the ceiling at the base of the stairwell. Detectors should be installed within 15 feet of the bedrooms so they can be heard when the door is closed. But, remember not to install a detector within 3 feet of an air supply register that may blow smoke away. Don't install a detector between an air return and the sleeping area. The smoke will be re-circulated and diluted resulting in a delayed alarm. If you are installing more than one detector you may want to consider purchasing units that can be interconnected. That way when one unit detects smoke, all the detectors will sound the alarm.

# HOME SAFETY

## How Are Detectors Powered?

Detectors can be powered in two ways.

- Batteries – these are the easiest to install. They require no outlets or wiring connection, however, batteries must be replaced twice a year. All UL listed battery operated detectors are required to sound a trouble signal when a replacement is needed. The signal usually lasts 7 days, so it's advised to check the efficiency of the detector following extended periods away.
- Household Current Detectors can be powered with household current two ways. They can be plugged into any wall socket or can be wired permanently into your home's electrical system.

## How Can I Best Care for My Detector?

Dirt, extreme changes in temperature and cooking exhaust can cause a false alarm or malfunction of the detector. To prevent false alarms, locate the detector away from air vents, air conditioners and fans. Keep the grillwork free of dirt by occasional vacuuming and dusting. Don't paint the cover of a smoke detector as this may clog the grillwork. Test your detector every month, or more often if necessary to make sure it's working. This is usually done with the test button, if provided.

## Fire Extinguishers

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When used properly, portable fire extinguishers can help save lives and property. They are also useful in containing small fires until the fire department arrives. Portable home fire extinguishers are not designed to extinguish large or spreading fires. Even against small fires, they are useful only under certain conditions. Before using a portable fire extinguisher, be sure the fire department has been notified.

# HOME SAFETY

Fire extinguishers come in different classes. Know what is on fire and use the proper extinguisher.

- Class A – ordinary combustibles such as wood, paper, plastics, cloth
- Class B – Flammable liquids such as grease and oil
- Class C – Electrical equipment
- Class D – Flammable metals, such as magnesium

### **When a fire occurs, always:**

- First call 911 and sound any alarms
- Evacuate immediately
- Rescue anyone in danger



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The State of Illinois Carbon Monoxide Alarm Detector Act mandates that every dwelling unit in Illinois must be equipped with at least one carbon monoxide alarm within 15 feet of every room used for sleeping purposes. You can also purchase combination smoke and carbon monoxide detectors for your home.

### **When a fire occurs, never:**

- Attempt to extinguish a large or rapidly growing fire
- Fight fires without an escape route
- Fight fires in a smoke filled room
- Fight fires if you are in doubt
- Assume the fire is out. Wait until the area is inspected by the Fire Department

# HOME SAFETY

## **You can try to use a fire extinguisher if you:**

- Know the fire is small and confined
- Keep a clear escape route. Don't let the fire get between you and the exit
- Stay low, below the smoke
- If you have any doubt, leave the area
- Leave if the fire grows out of control
- Close the door to contain the fire before you leave
- Wait for the Fire Department's permission before you re-enter the area

## **How to Prevent Cooking Fires and How to Fight Them if They Get Started:**

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- Pay attention to your cooking. Don't overheat grease. Watch grease overflows that can start fires. If you have to leave the stove to answer the phone or doorbell, turn down the heat. If you'll be gone more than a few minutes, turn it off.
- If your grandchildren help you cook, make them aware of cooking hazards. Turn skillet and hot handles toward the center of the stove to prevent accidental overturning.
- Don't leave towels or napkins on or near the stove. Don't wear frilly garments – especially those with loose, floppy sleeves – while cooking.
- Keep a Class ABC fire extinguisher in or near the kitchen. An ABC rating indicates the fire extinguisher can be used on fires involving grease, paper towels, electrical appliances, and other materials commonly found in the kitchen.
- If a grease fire is small, you may be able to stop it with a handful of baking soda. But don't use baking powder, which contains flour or starch and could spread the fire. And never use water on a grease fire; it also increases the chance of this type of fire getting out of hand.
- Always have a pot lid handy to smother a small grease fire.
- Don't try to move or carry a pan in which there is a grease fire. Even though moving the pan is common reaction when a grease fire is discovered, it often results in burns to the carrier and additional fire damage.
- If a fire is a big one, don't try to fight it – call the Fire Department.

# HOME SAFETY

## Winter Fire Safety

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Americans facing an energy shortage are turning to alternate sources of home heating. The old pot-bellied and Franklin stove market is suddenly booming. Space heaters are selling rapidly, or coming out of storage. Fireplaces are burning wood or man-made logs. All of these supplementary heating measures can be good. But they can increase the danger of fires in homes.

### Room Heating:

Space heaters and heating stoves are used throughout the nation to increase the warmth in rooms. They do the job, but can be dangerous. To use them safely:

- Never use fuel burning appliances without proper vents to the outside. Burning fuel, such as kerosene, coal or propane, produces deadly fumes.
- Be sure your heater is in good working condition. All room heaters need frequent check-ups and cleaning. A dirty or neglected heater is a critical fire hazard.
- Use only the proper fuel for each heater. Never introduce a fuel into a unit that is not designated for that fuel.
- Never quicken a fire with kerosene or gasoline. Keep gasoline or other flammable liquids stored outside of the home at all times.
- Maintain adequate clearance in all directions around space heaters and heating stoves. Surrounding surfaces should not become too hot to touch with your bare hand. Three feet is the minimum clearance around all sides. Use a screen around stoves or space heaters which have open flames.
- If you use an electric heater, make sure your house wiring is adequate. Avoid overloading the circuit. Avoid overloading extension cords.
- When refueling an oil unit, avoid overfilling it. If cold oil is used, it will expand as it warms up inside your home and may cause burner flooding which could cause flare-ups. Never fill your heater while it is burning.
- Keep young children away from space heaters, particularly when they are wearing loose clothing that can be sucked in by a draft created by the heater and ignited.
- If you are using an approved, UL labeled space heater or heating stove in your bedroom, turn off the heater or turn it low before going to bed. When using a fuel burning stove in a bedroom, open the window. Ventilation prevents suffocation that can be caused by heaters consuming oxygen.
- Use only safety listed equipment. If you choose an oil heater, look for the UL level; a gas appliance, the AGA or UL label; or an electric heater, the UL label.

# HOME SAFETY

## Fireplaces

When temperatures inside are kept down, a crackling fire in the fireplace is a cozy and cheery way to keep warm. But these fires, if not carefully tended, could cause tragedy. To use them safely:

- Do not use flammable liquids to start the fire.
- Keep a metal screen in front of your fireplace. Flying embers can start fires.
- Don't use excessive amounts of paper to build roaring fires in fireplaces. It is possible to ignite soot in the chimney by overbuilding the fire.
- Never burn charcoal in a fireplace or in a charcoal broiler or hibachi indoors. Burning charcoal gives off deadly amounts of carbon monoxide.
- Be sure no flammable materials hang down from or decorate your mantel. A spark hitting them from the fireplace could ignite them and cause a fire.
- When you go to bed, be sure the fire is out. Never close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace. A closed damper can help hot ashes build up heat to the point that a fire could flare up and ignite the room while you are asleep.
- If your fireplace hasn't been used for some time, have it and the chimney checked before using.
- Follow the directions on the package if you use man-made logs. Never break a man-made log apart to quicken the fire.

## Furnace Heating

It is important that you have your furnace checked and cleaned regularly to ensure that it is in good working condition. Furnace fire safety needs to be observed year round. Some things you should know:

- Leave furnace work to experts. Don't attempt repairs unless you are qualified.
- Have an expert check the wall and ceiling near the furnace and flue. If they are hot, additional insulation or clearance may be necessary.
- Keep trash and combustible storage away from the heating system.

# HOME SAFETY

## **Kitchen Stoves:**

- Never use a gas range or an oven to heat your kitchen. Any unvented fuel burning appliance is capable of producing deadly levels of carbon monoxide.



## **High Rise Fire Safety**

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Several recent fires in high rise apartment buildings have renewed interest in fire safety on the part of the public, and in particular, apartment dwellers. Since high rise buildings are of fire-resistant construction and possess reliable enclosed stairways, fires are generally confined to individual apartments or possibly the contents of one floor. For these reasons, it is important to understand that fire in a residential high rise building is no cause for panic. The Fire Department responds to all residential high rise buildings with a heavy complement of equipment and firefighters, experienced in rescue and fire control operations. Upon arriving, this force will promptly affect necessary rescues, confine and control the fire and ventilate the smoke from the building.

If a fire occurs in your apartment or a neighboring apartment, it will most likely be necessary for you to seek refuge as soon as possible; therefore, it is extremely important that you become well acquainted with the stairways provided in your building and the procedures to follow in case of fire. In case of fire or smoke near your apartment:

# HOME SAFETY

- Call the Fire Department immediately. State the address (do not use vanity addresses), the floor, the apartment number and what you have seen. Don't assume that someone else has already called.
- Before you attempt to leave your apartment, feel the door with the back of your hand. If the door feels warm to the touch within five seconds, do not open it. This indicates the presence of a dangerous fire condition in the corridor. If the door is not warm to the touch, carefully open it a few inches to check for the possible presence of smoke in the corridor.
- If you determine that the corridor can be used, alert occupants of the other apartments on your floor and proceed to the closest exit stairway. Close, but do not lock, your apartment door. Close the stairway door behind you. Do not attempt to use the elevators!
- If your apartment door is warm or if there is heavy smoke in the corridor, keep the door closed. Use a wet towel to seal the cracks around the door and any other place where smoke appears to be entering.
- If smoke enters your apartment, open a window slightly. In apartments having windows which cannot be opened, remain close to the floor.
- However, the possibility exists that fire from the outside may spread to your apartment through the window. If this condition occurs, close your windows and attempt to remove any combustibles at once, i.e. drapes, shades.
- Each occupant should be familiar with the location of all exit stairways on his/her floor. In addition, occupants should plan in advance what to do if the closest exit stairway cannot be used during a fire emergency.

Following the above steps together with careful pre-fire planning will greatly increase your chances of surviving a fire in your building. Since no two fires are alike, plan carefully and learn your building layout so that you can change your exit plan as conditions warrant.

## **Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls**

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Many people think falls are a normal part of aging. The truth is they're not. Most falls can be prevented—and you have the power to reduce your risk. Exercising, managing your medications, having your vision checked, and making your living environment safer are all steps you can take to prevent a fall. To promote greater awareness and understanding here are 10 common myths—and the reality—about older adult falls:

# HOME SAFETY

**Myth 1: *Falling happens to other people, not to me.***

Reality: Many people think, “It won’t happen to me.” But the truth is that 1 in 3 older adults—about 12 million—fall every year in the U.S.

**Myth 2: *Falling is something normal that happens as you get older.***

Reality: Falling is not a normal part of aging. Strength and balance exercises, managing your medications, having your vision checked and making your living environment safer are all steps you can take to prevent a fall.

**Myth 3: *If I limit my activity, I won’t fall.***

Reality: Some people believe that the best way to prevent falls is to stay at home and limit activity. Not true. Performing physical activities will actually help you stay independent, as your strength and range of motion benefit from remaining active. Social activities are also good for your overall health.

**Myth 4: *As long as I stay at home, I can avoid falling.***

Reality: Over half of all falls take place at home. Inspect your home for fall risks. Fix simple but serious hazards such as clutter, throw rugs, and poor lighting. Make simple home modifications, such as adding grab bars in the bathroom, a second handrail on stairs, and non-slip paint on outdoor steps.

**Myth 5: *Muscle strength and flexibility can’t be regained.***

Reality: While we do lose muscle as we age, exercise can partially restore strength and flexibility. It’s never too late to start an exercise program. Even if you’ve been a “couch potato” your whole life, becoming active now will benefit you in many ways—including protection from falls.

**Myth 6: *Taking medication doesn’t increase my risk of falling.***

Reality: Taking any medication may increase your risk of falling. Medications affect people in many different ways and can sometimes make you dizzy or sleepy. Be careful when starting a new medication. Talk to your health care provider about potential side effects or interactions with other medications.

# HOME SAFETY

**Myth 7: *I don't need to get my vision checked every year.***

**Reality:** Vision is another key risk factor for falls. Aging is associated with some forms of vision loss that increase the risk of falling and injury. People with vision problems are more than twice as likely to fall as those without visual impairment. Have your eyes checked at least once a year and update your eyeglasses. For those with low vision there are programs and assistive devices that can help. Ask your optometrist for a referral.

**Myth 8: *Using a walker or cane will make me more dependent.***

**Reality:** Walking aids are very important in helping many older adults maintain or improve their mobility. However, make sure you use these devices safely. Have a physical therapist fit the walker or cane to you and instruct you in its safe use.

**Myth 9: *I don't need to talk to family members or my health care provider if I'm concerned about my risk of falling. I don't want to alarm them, and I want to keep my independence.***

**Reality:** Fall prevention is a team effort. Bring it up with your doctor, family, and anyone else who is in a position to help. They want to help you maintain your mobility and reduce your risk of falling.

**Myth 10: *I don't need to talk to my parent, spouse, or other older adult if I'm concerned about their risk of falling. It will hurt their feelings, and it's none of my business.***

**Reality:** Let them know about your concerns and offer support to help them maintain the highest degree of independence possible. There are many things you can do, including removing hazards in the home, finding a fall prevention program in the community, or setting up a vision exam.



