



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

IFAS EXTENSION

Keeping it Safe: Home and Personal Safety, Fire Extinguishers, Smoke Detectors, Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters, Carbon Monoxide Detectors¹

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There are several items that you should have to protect your family and home.

- Fire extinguisher
- Smoke detectors
- Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs)
- Carbon monoxide detectors
- Locks on your doors and windows

Fire Extinguisher

It is a good idea to have a fire extinguisher in your house. It is also important to know how and when to use it. Your landlord may provide a fire extinguisher. If so put it in or near the kitchen.

There are 3 types of fires:

A. Fires of ordinary products such as wood, cloth, and paper

B. Fires that involve flammable liquids such as cooking grease, gasoline, kerosene, paint solvents, etc.

C. Fires that involve electrical equipment.

Fire extinguishers are labeled with the type fire they will fight. ABC model fire extinguishers are the most popular type because they can be used for all 3 types of fires. BC models are the second most popular. They fight grease fires and electrical fires.

Use your fire extinguisher only for small, beginning fires. Do not try to fight fast moving, established fires or those that you have any doubt of your ability to control. Do not move containers of burning liquids. You could spread the fire or be badly burned.

Instead:

- Evacuate the building
- Immediately call 911

1. This document is FCS5233-05, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences, University of Florida. Publication: May 2002. Revised: December 2005. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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- Meet family members in a pre-determined spot OUTSIDE of the house. Never re-enter a burning building.

It is always a good idea to have a family evacuation plan in the event of a fire.

Smoke Detectors

There should be at least one smoke detector in your home. It should be located in a hallway, near the bedrooms. If your home has more than one floor, a smoke detector should be located on each floor.

There are two basic types of smoke detectors:

- Battery-powered
- Hard-wired

Battery-powered smoke detector

A small dry cell battery that should be replaced each year powers these smoke detectors. Your battery-powered smoke detector is of no value without a battery or if the battery is dead.

Hard-wired smoke detector

Hard-wired smoke detectors are connected to the houses electrical system. If smoke is detected in one part of the house, all alarms will sound as long as there is electrical power. However, the detector will not work if the electricity is off because of a power failure due to the fire or for any other reason. Most hard-wired smoke detectors have a battery as a backup in the event of an electrical failure. Remember to replace the backup batteries periodically. The battery is an important safety feature but the battery must be replaced each year.

Test your smoke detector

Every two or three months test your smoke detector alarm by pressing the “test” button firmly for five (5) seconds. The alarm should sound. If the alarm does not sound, contact your landlord immediately. If your smoke detector occasionally “chirps” it means the battery is getting low. You need to replace the battery.

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs)

GFCIs are a part of the home electrical system designed to protect people from a shock, which can happen instantly, even before a circuit breaker can trip. For example, a curling iron dropped in a bathtub will electrocute anyone who is in contact with the bath water. Even a circuit breaker cannot act fast enough to prevent electrocution.

New homes are required to have GFCIs in the bathrooms, kitchen, garage, and outside outlets to protect people from accidents like the example mentioned above. Most commonly, a GFCI ((Figures 1 and 2) is installed in the place of a conventional grounded circuit and can protect all outlets on that circuit. If any outlet on that circuit is not working the GFCI reset button (in the circuit box or one of the outlets) can turn the electricity back on.

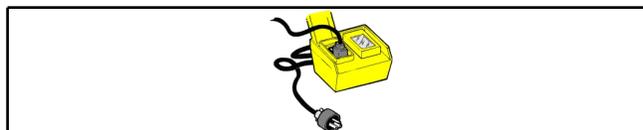


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

What is carbon monoxide (CO)?

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, and toxic gas. It is produced as a byproduct of combustion. Any fuel-burning appliance, vehicle, tool, or other device has the potential to produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide gas if it is not operating at top efficiency.

Do I need a CO detector?

You need a CO detector in your home if you have one or more carbon-monoxide-producing devices:

- Fuel-fired furnace
- Gas water heater
- Fireplace and/or woodstove
- Gas stove
- Gas clothes dryer
- Charcoal grill
- Gasoline powered lawnmower and other gasoline powered yard equipment
- Motor vehicles

CO detectors operate either by battery or by plugging into an electrical outlet. There should be at least one detector on each sleeping level of your home. There should be an additional detector in the area of any major gas-burning appliances: a gas furnace, gas water heater, or gas stove. Detectors should be placed low to the ground because carbon monoxide is a heavy gas. The detector should be at least five feet from any gas-fueled appliance or fuel-burning device.

What should I do if my carbon monoxide detector goes off, evacuate or ventilate?

When the carbon monoxide detector sounds an alarm go outside for fresh air because the carbon monoxide is at a dangerous level. Most of the time you will be all right within a few minutes.

However, if someone in the household feels ill, or is experiencing “flu-like” symptoms like headache, nausea or dizziness, evacuate all members of your house to a safe location and call 911.

Remember to change the batteries in you carbon monoxide detector, if it is battery operated.

**DO NOT REMOVE THE BATTERIES
FROM THE CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR**

FOR ANY REASON!! except to replace old batteries.

This small device could save your life.