

Cy-Fair Fire Department Identifies 17 Hidden Fire Hazards to Tackle During Spring Cleaning

Spring cleaning is an opportunity to audit homes for fire risk. Here, Cy-Fair Fire Department shares a checklist of 17 common indoor and outdoor fire hazards.

HOUSTON, TX, UNITED STATES, March 4, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Most people think of homes as safe havens. But often, says Cy-Fair Fire Department's Daniel Anderson, they're filled with fire hazards. As warmer temperatures arrive, spring cleaning is a good opportunity to focus on tasks that may not be included in regular housekeeping routines.

"From a fire prevention standpoint, it's important to clean specific areas, organize and declutter in places where items tend to accumulate, and ensure that flammable substances are properly stored or disposed of," says Anderson, Cy-Fair's district chief of suppression training. "If you're having trouble finding the motivation to get started on your spring cleaning, think about it from a safety perspective. You aren't just cleaning; you're making your home a safer place for you, your family, and your pets to live."

Here are some hidden fire hazards to pay attention to:

Indoor Items and Areas to Focus On:

Mail, Papers, and Magazines: It's easy to let these things accumulate, but allowing flammable items to pile up anywhere is a fire hazard. Clutter of any kind enables fire to spread more quickly—and paper items are one of the worst culprits.

"Take a few moments to set up a filing system for papers you need to keep—it can be as simple as a tabbed accordion folder," says Anderson. "Choose the 'digital' or 'paperless' option for bills and notifications, if possible."

Electronics and Lithium-Ion Batteries: Check junk drawers, desks, entertainment cabinets, and the backs of closets for broken or outdated electronics, especially those that contain lithium-ion batteries. This type of battery can ignite and cause a fire if old or damaged. Once on fire, lithium-ion batteries generate intense heat.

"Don't throw items with lithium-ion batteries in the trash," warns Anderson. "They continue to pose a fire hazard at waste management facilities and landfills. Instead, take them to a safe

collection site.”

Electrical Outlets and Cords: Check for overloaded outlets and power strips. Knotted or tightly coiled electrical cords are also a risk. Both of these things can lead to overheating and electrical fires.

“Make sure all cords are untangled and laid flat, and avoid running cords under carpet or furniture where heat can build up unnoticed,” advises Anderson. “Regularly inspect cords and plugs for damage, and replace any that show signs of wear and tear.”

Closets: Closets tend to be stuffed with clothing, linens, boxes, and more. Unfortunately, excess “stuff”—even if it’s organized and out of sight in a closet—can enable a blaze to travel more quickly through your home.

“I’m not saying you need to become a dedicated minimalist, but it’s a good idea to pare down where you can,” Anderson says.

Cleaning Supplies: While using these supplies to spring clean, take the opportunity to set aside any chemicals (e.g., alcohol and acetone) or aerosol cans that are not being used or that have expired. Take them to a designated household hazardous waste facility. Make sure the supplies that remain in the home aren’t stored near sources of heat. For more information, please visit the Harris County Household Hazardous Waste website:

<https://www.eng.hctx.net/consultants/household-hazardous/household-hazardous-waste>.

“Also, be aware of which household chemicals shouldn’t be used together,” says Anderson.

“While this isn’t a fire hazard per se, using the wrong combination can be very dangerous.” He warns to never mix the following:

1. Bleach and Ammonia: This combination produces chloramine vapors, which are highly toxic and can be deadly.
2. Bleach and Vinegar: Mixing these substances creates chlorine gas. Even at low levels, it can cause coughing; breathing problems; and burning, watery eyes.
3. Bleach and Rubbing Alcohol: This combination forms chloroform, a volatile compound that can be hazardous.
4. Hydrogen Peroxide and Vinegar: Combining these two creates peracetic/peroxyacetic acid, which can be highly corrosive and irritating to the skin, eyes, and respiratory system.
5. Different Drain Cleaners: Mixing different brands or types of drain cleaners can cause the release of chlorine gas and other potentially toxic chemicals.

Kitchens and Pantries: According to the U.S. Fire Administration

(<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/home-fires/prevent-fires/cooking/#:~:text=Cooking%20is%2C%20by%20far%2C%20the,%24494%20million%20in%20property%20loss.>), cooking is the top cause of home fires in the United States. Dump the crumbs from the bottom of the toaster and clean the inside of the oven. A vent hood can be a fire hazard

because grease from cooking accumulates on its filters and inside the ductwork, which can easily ignite when exposed to high heat from the stovetop. Suds up and degrease those grates and filters. Spring cleaning is a good time to give kitchen appliances a good scrub.

"If a cooking fire does start, decluttering and organizing your kitchen and pantry can keep the flames from spreading as quickly," says Anderson. "Go through drawers, cabinets, and pantries and discard any old or unused food items, dish towels, potholders, cookbooks, and so on. Store everything away from cooking surfaces."

Kids' Rooms: "Kids' bedrooms are full of flammable items like stuffed animals, books, puzzles, board games, blankets, and more," says Anderson. "Throw away or donate anything they don't need or want."

Exhaust Fans: Lint, dust, and grease can accumulate on fan blades and in ducts, creating a significant fire risk when the fan heats up. If there is an exhaust fan in the kitchen, bathroom, or elsewhere, clean it by turning off power to the fan, removing the cover, and using a vacuum with a brush attachment to clear away debris.

Laundry Room: Lint accumulation causes numerous house fires every year. Unplug the dryer and disconnect the duct from the back of the machine. Use a vacuum with a long hose attachment to remove lint from the duct, the back of the dryer, and the home's external vent.

"Specialized dryer vent cleaning brush kits can be used for an even deeper clean," says Anderson. "Once you're done, reconnect everything securely and run the dryer on air-only for a few minutes to blow out any remaining debris."

Entrances and Exits: Ensure that doors and windows are easy to access and not obstructed by furniture or other household items.

"Actually, walk through your entire home with an eye toward ease of movement," Anderson advises. "Is there a clear pathway through all rooms?"

Garage and Attic: It's easy for these areas to become catchalls for sporting goods, yard maintenance equipment, cardboard boxes, old holiday decorations, unused furniture, and more. All of these things can enable a fire to spread faster.

"Many people also store flammable products like cleaners, kerosene, paint, and propane in these spaces, which increases the risk," says Anderson. "Dispose of, donate, and organize these items. Make sure nothing is stored within three feet of furnaces, water heaters, and other sources of heat."

Outdoor Items and Areas to Focus On:

“When spring cleaning, don’t forget outdoor areas,” reminds Anderson. “If a fire starts outside, the amount of ‘stuff’ around your house can play a large role in whether or how quickly the blaze spreads.”

Here are some areas to pay attention to:

Garbage Cans: Most trash is flammable. If possible, don’t keep garbage bins directly next to the home.

Grill: If the grill has sat idle throughout the colder months, be sure to clean any grease, dirt, and other build-up before using it. Check for nests and spider webs.

Driveway: In the busyness of daily life, driveways can become “home” to grills, bicycles, children’s outdoor toys, yard equipment, and more.

“Not only can these items be a fire hazard, they can also make it difficult for first responders to access your home in the event of an emergency,” says Anderson.

Gutters: Leaves and other debris tend to accumulate in gutters over the fall and winter. Especially as the weather warms up, they can dry out quickly.

Yard Debris: Dispose of tree limbs, brush, and yard clippings that may have accumulated over the winter. Pay special attention to the areas within five feet of the home and clear away any dead vegetation in landscaping beds or pots.

“While firewood piles do serve a purpose, don’t locate them adjacent to your home,” advises Anderson.

Sheds and Outbuildings: These can easily become overstuffed dumping grounds full of flammable items. And since they are not attached to the home, people are less likely to notice a fire before it begins to spread.

“Be especially cautious if you store flammable fuels or pool chemicals in an outbuilding,” Anderson warns. “Ensure that these items are stored in a ventilated area that doesn’t get too hot.”

“While this isn’t technically a cleaning task, I’ll end with a friendly reminder to test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and replace them if necessary,” concludes Anderson. “Ensure that you own in-date fire extinguishers and/or fire blankets, and that your family has created and discussed an escape plan. Even when you do your best to minimize fire hazards in the home, accidents can happen—and you want to be prepared!”

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About CFFD:

The Cy-Fair Fire Department (CFFD) provides professional fire and emergency medical services to the citizens of Northwest Harris County, Texas. From its beginnings in the late 1950s, the Cy-Fair FD is now one of the largest, busiest combination fire departments in the United States, with over 38,000 emergency responses each year. CFFD covers the 164-square-mile area of Harris County Emergency Services District #9 (HCESD9) in the unincorporated part of Northwest Harris County. Responding from 13 stations strategically located throughout the territory, the 550-plus men and women of the fire department are among the best trained and equipped firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and dispatchers in the nation.

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