



# Safety Tips for Homeowners

## **Porches and Decks**

Visually inspect porches, balconies, elevated free-standing decks and similar structures at least twice a year for safety. Inspect for split wood, rotting wood, loose or missing nails or screws and anchors where the porch attaches to the building. Inspect also for damaged or loose support beams and planking and wobbly handrails or guardrails. If the porch moves when people walk or jump, it may need extra support. Elevated decks must be braced at the columns in addition to where the beams and columns connect. Be sure to get a permit from the local building department when building or repairing a porch or deck. This will help to ensure that the porch or deck meets building safety codes and will be inspected by the local building inspector.

## **Smoke Detectors**

What is the most important thing to remember when installing a smoke alarm? Location. Location. Location.

Smoke alarms can't help you unless you can hear them. The building code requires smoke alarms to be installed in every bedroom, any hallway leading to a bedroom, and each level of a multi-story building. Keep your batteries fresh by replacing them every year when you set back your clocks. Be sure all windows and hallways are clear of obstructions that might prevent you from exiting your house in an emergency. All security bars on windows must release easily in an emergency. Also, remember that large pieces of furniture such as headboards, bookcases and dressers placed in front of windows make it difficult for you to get out or for firefighters to get in.

## **Electrical Outlets**

Don't let an octopus in your house. Never overload an outlet with more appliances than it is designed to hold. One spark could start a very serious fire. Be sure to use a safe power strip with surge protection instead or unplug appliances when they are not being used. Also, avoid using appliances with damaged cords. Building codes require homes to be built with a ground fault interrupter (GFI) in each outlet located near a water source, such as a kitchen sink, bathroom basin or bathtub. Older homes may not have these, but homeowners can have GFIs installed or even install them themselves.

## **Furnace Safety**

If your gas furnace does not get enough air to properly burn fuel, it will starve. This allows partially burned fuel and carbon monoxide to infiltrate



back into your home causing illness or even death. You can help prevent this from occurring by having your gas furnace inspected and cleaned once a year by a qualified heating specialist. Contact your local gas company or building department for more information.

### **Mold Prevention**

Unchecked mold growth on interior wood, wallboard, wallpaper and carpet has been blamed for illness and can be difficult to eradicate. Homeowners can control mold by controlling moisture on surfaces and in the air. Clean surface mold by wiping or scrubbing with water and a detergent; never mix chlorine bleach with cleaning solutions that contain ammonia as toxic fumes can be produced. Discard moldy items that cannot be cleaned. Fix leaky plumbing as soon as possible. Protect the building envelope with a water resistive barrier. Provide proper ventilation for all interior habitable areas and specific concealed spaces. Dehumidify to reduce the moisture in the air - a low indoor humidity below 60 percent relative humidity is good, while a 30 to 50 percent indoor humidity is ideal. Keep heating, ventilation and air conditioning drip pans clean and unobstructed. Vent moisture-generating appliances such as dryers to the outside. Keep a regular schedule of building HVAC inspections and maintenance. Protect the foundation by providing draining or sloping the ground away from the foundation walls.

**For more information, visit the International Code Council's web site at [www.iccsafe.org](http://www.iccsafe.org).**