

Childproofing Your Home



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In my 26 years of experience as a fireman I have seen the results of carelessness and injuries to children. Many of these injuries could have easily been prevented with easy measures that any parent can do. Here are a few steps that you can do:

Fire and Carbon Monoxide hazards: In 2000, 561 children ages 14 and under died in the US from fire or smoke inhalation. On average, approximately 40,000 children are injured each year according to The National Safe Kids Campaign. By ensuring the smoke detectors are installed in or by bedrooms and tested monthly, the number of fire related injuries can be reduced by ½! From 1988 to 1996, approximately 600 people died annually in the US from CO poisoning according to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention). Forced air gas furnaces with cracked heat exchangers, plugged chimney flues, negatively pressurized fireboxes in the fireplace, and malfunctioning gas stoves are just some sources of the potentially deadly gas. Your first line of defense should always be a CO gas detector installed on every level of the home. At \$50-\$60 per CO detector, how can you afford not to have one? Take a look at your smoke detectors, if they are more than 10 years old replace them. As smoke detectors age, they lose their sensitivity and ability to quickly warn you of a fire. You should have smoke detectors on every level of your home and in the garage. Current standards also place one in each bedroom.

Crush hazards: I can't tell you how many homes I have inspected where heavy shelves were not anchored to the wall, where top-heavy TV's, microwaves, or fish tanks were sitting on flimsy stands, where drawers were left open on a dresser that a child could climb and tip over, where kitchen appliances were plugged in to the wall at the knee level waiting for a child to tug the toaster or mixer down from the counter, or where the garage door opener's auto-reverse function takes all of my strength to trigger because the homeowner did not test it monthly. (To test the garage door, simply wave your foot across the electronic eyes when closing. Then apply a light upward pressure as the door is closing the second time without standing in the way of the eyes. If it does not stop and go back up, you need to have it serviced.) All of these can seriously injure or kill a child, yet are easily preventable.

Fall hazards: On stairs, you always want to have child gates at the top and bottom. Railings must have balusters that are 4" maximum width to prevent a small child from crawling through or getting ones head stuck. Bench seats on 2nd story decks may look nice, but easily allow a child access to climb over the railing. Windows should be kept

locked or window coverings placed over them in case a child does climb to that level. Never have a crib next to the window. Large window wells are typically 5'-6' deep. They should have metal grates or strong plastic covers over them no matter where they are in regards to heavy foot traffic. Let me share with you my personal fall hazard story: When I was 3 years old, my parents could not find me. My dad had been working on the roof of our ranch-style house that day and had left the ladder leaning up against the house. When they found me, I had made my way to within 1 foot of the eave on the roof! I guess that explains why I'm not afraid of heights☺

Drowning hazards: There are over 1,000 children drowning in the US each year according to The National Safe Kids Campaign. Drowning is the 2nd leading cause of child deaths in the US. Young children are top-heavy. They can drown in as little as 1" of water. When they look in a toilet, they can tip over and fall in. With that said, how many other things can you think of that pose a drowning hazard? Buckets, diaper pails, bathtubs, sinks, shower base, spas, hot tubs, swimming pools, and sump pump pits are some items that come to my mind. Keep toilet lids shut and bathroom doors closed, store buckets and diaper pails out of reach, keep fences around pools and hard covers on hot tubs locked, and never let your guard down when your child is around these hazards.

Strangulation hazards: Window pull cords that form a loop are the leading causes of child strangulation accidents. If your window coverings were installed before 1995, there is a high chance that your cord forms a loop. This is an easy fix. Simply cut the ends to eliminate the loop, tie on the cord weights, and tie in cord stops (knots) at the top where you want the blind to stop at. To see an illustrated version, go to www.windowcoverings.org/howtorepair.html. Other strangulation hazards can be found on toys with cords, strings, or straps that are longer than 7".

Choking hazards: Children ages 2 & under want to put everything in their mouth. In 2001, 202,500 children 14 & under went to the emergency room for toy related injuries according to The National Safe Kids Campaign. Latex balloons were the #1 culprit! Buy mylar balloons for your next birthday party, avoid toys with sharp objects or edges, and always purchase toys within the child's suggested age group. Small parts testers can be purchased at toy specialty stores. They test toy parts for children 3 & under.

Poison hazards: Children 5 & under are at a great risk of ingesting poison. Hazardous poisons can be found in cleaning supplies, pesticides, medicine, vitamins, cosmetics, alcohol, and plants to name a few. The general rule of thumb is to keep them out of reach and locked up. If you have an emergency, The Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Center is located in Denver and can be reached at 1 (800) 222-1222. Many childproof locks exist today to keep the poisons out of harm's way. The best ones I have come across during an inspection are the magnet-activated lock type. One Seller actually snickered at me when she saw me trying to get into the kitchen cabinets.

To sum it all up, put yourself in your small child's shoes. If your little girl or boy can reach it, pull it, climb it, eat it, touch it, they probably will. Safeguard your home and many easily avoidable accidents will be averted.

For more information, the following websites very helpful:

www.safekids.org

www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/chld_sfy.html

www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/grand/12steps/12steps.html

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Mountain View Property Inspections. If you would like to know more about safety in your home go to **WWW.MVPinspection.com** If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or MVPInspection@attbi.com