

Smoking and Home Oxygen Systems



“Some People Don’t Know When to Quit”

Many people with respiratory problems now use home oxygen systems. Unfortunately, some people smoke while on oxygen which can be deadly to them and to people around them.

Oxygen Helps Fire Spread Fast!

Oxygen increases the speed at which things burn once a fire starts. Home oxygen therapy increases the amount of oxygen in the environment. It will saturate clothing, fabric, hair, beards and anything in the area. Even flame-retardant clothing can burn when the oxygen content increases.

- *Never* smoke or light a match while using oxygen.
- Keep all flames and heat sources away from oxygen containers and oxygen systems.
- Do not allow smoking inside of a home where oxygen is used. Even if it is not being used at a particular moment, the home is still an oxygen enriched environment, and fire can get out of hand quickly.

For health care people:

Before sending a patient home on oxygen, health care providers must make sure the patient understands the dangers of smoking in an oxygen enriched environment. Smokers should be asked about their intentions. If they are unwilling to quit, the risk of fire can outweigh the benefit of oxygen therapy.

Too Many People Injured and Killed

- On March 27, 2004, a 39-year old Salem woman became disoriented and was overcome by heat and smoke in a fatal apartment fire. A female roommate was using a home oxygen system when a cigarette ignited a piece of bedroom furniture. Six other civilians were injured in the fire.
- On January 13, 2004, the Holbrook Fire Department was called to a fire in a single-family home. A resident used home oxygen for a medical condition and a dropped cigarette ignited the living room couch on fire. Several small explosions occurred when oxygen tanks ruptured from the heat. One civilian

(over)



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was treated for smoke inhalation and a firefighter was injured during the fire. Damages from the fire exceeded \$270,000.

- On November 29, 2003, a 56-year old Mashpee woman died in a fire at her home. The woman, a known heavy smoker, was on home oxygen for a respiratory disease.
- On October 22, 2003, a 75-year old Springfield woman suffered burns to her face when she lit her cigarette while her oxygen supply tubing was still on.
- On June 24, 2003, a 71-year old Boston man who used home oxygen died in a flash fire. Even after shutting off the oxygen his clothing and the room was still oxygen-enriched. When he lit his cigarette his clothing suddenly caught fire. His wife and daughter suffered burns on their hands trying to extinguish the flames.
- On October 28, 2002, a fire occurred in the home of a 56-year old Boston man, a smoker with lung disease, utilizing a home oxygen therapy system. The fire, caused by a dropped cigarette, ignited combustibles and caused an oxygen tank to rupture which accelerated the blaze. The fire claimed the life of his 8-year old daughter.

People on home oxygen therapy need to plan and practice home fire escape drills

Individuals, family members and medical personnel can assist in identifying the patient's physical limitations and assess their ability to escape from the residence on their own in the event of a fire.

Make sure the home is equipped with working smoke alarms

- Have the alarms tested at least once a month.
- Change smoke alarm batteries at least once a year.
- Specialized smoke alarms are available for the hearing impaired.

Plan two escape routes from each room

- Make sure the escape path is clear and remove any obstacles.
- Arrange for special care or assistance if the patient is immobilized.

Practice the escape plan with the patient at least twice a year

Call 911 to summon help if needed

- Keep a phone by the bed or favorite chair.
- Wear a medical alert alarm.

Since 1997, 17 people have died and 30 other individuals have suffered severe burns or smoke inhalation in fires involving people who were smoking while using home oxygen systems.

Please don't become another grim statistic, keep open flames and smoking materials away from oxygen therapy equipment.