

# AfterWords

A NEWSLETTER FROM AFTERDISASTER  
THE WATER AND FIRE EMERGENCY TEAM

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## PREVENTING HOME DISASTERS

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**AFTERDISASTER**® would like to help you prevent disasters in your home. That's right, prevent them! Following are our observations from day to day field experience in mitigation and repair of fire, water, and mold damages that might help you reduce the risks in your home.

The number one fire problem in the kitchen is the typical stove top fire where the cook was distracted and the grease ignited or a protein food (*beans, meat, etc.*) burned, creating a very bad odor. Consider how many appliances have heating elements that can produce enough heat to start a fire: stove top burners, the oven, toaster, coffee maker, crock pot, waffle iron, dishwasher drying elements, microwave oven, etc. Left unattended or too close to other materials these appliances are often the source of kitchen fires. Many times there is an automatic timer or ON/OFF switch that malfunctions so that the appliance turns on at an unexpected time. Another problem is overloading the electrical circuit or extension cord with too many items at the same time, causing the wiring to overheat. Kitchens also are the site of many water damages. Pipes and plumbing connections fail, especially at sinks, water coolers, dishwashers, and icemakers. Check for pinched, aging or deteriorating connections and lines before the leak occurs. Dishwashers overflow when the float sticks with detergent residue or the door gaskets fail. Blocked drains and sewage backups also affect this area.

**Tip: The continuous amperage should not exceed 75% of the rated amperage for that circuit or extension cord.**

In the laundry room, standard rubber hoses connecting the washer to the water lines leak or burst under pressure, spraying large volumes of water everywhere. (*Replace them with metal braided reinforced hoses.*) Automatic cutoffs fail in the cycle and units overflow. Blocked drainpipes cause backup and overflow. The dryer often generates fire hazards by blocked venting or lint build-up. Blocked venting and lint build-up also prevents moisture extracted from the clothes from being vented outside the structure and often contributes to mold problems in the laundry area. Most vent hoses age quickly and collect build-up, so check it several times a year, along with inspection of the flap to close the vent on the exterior of the house. (*It may have fallen off or collected so much debris that it cannot close, allowing all kinds of critters to enter the house.*) Electric irons left unattended start many fires. Unplug them when not in use, fires have started by the malfunction of an ON/OFF switch when no one was home.

**Tip: Never leave home with the dishwasher, washing machine or dryer running.**

Bathrooms with plumbing leaks, leaky faucets, leaking drain connections, etc. all are sources of water damages and if not

repaired can encourage mold problems. Unplug curling irons and hair dryers when not in use. (*We have seen several fires caused by faulty ON/Off switches.*)

Bedrooms are increasingly the site of fires due to electrical devices: electric blankets and warmers, fans, air purifiers, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, irons, curling irons and hair dryers, TV's, radios, stereos, computers, etc.

**Tip: If the item has a heating device, unplug when not in use!**

Living rooms, dining rooms, dens, and home offices all contain many of the same potential hazards discussed above and should be checked for safe setup and safe operation, too.

Wherever the hot water heater is located, it should be serviced and checked as part of home maintenance. Leaking or defective water heaters can create anything from drips to a whole house flood if not detected and corrected early. Inspect the water heater on a regular basis for signs of deterioration, rust, and leaks. Many plumbing companies now offer maintenance agreements for them.

Many roof leaks are caused by worn or missing shingles, tree limbs on the roof, collected leaves and debris blocking drainage, clogged gutters, and problems with the flashing. Except in storm damages, most of these problems are preventable through regular maintenance and inspection. Basement floods and crawlspace floods are the result of landscaping and drainage problems (*blocked drains, ground slope, deteriorated or failing waterproofing, tree roots, etc.*) and are preventable if corrected before the hard rain occurs.

While discussing preventable disasters, we need to mention indoor air quality issues. Anyone can look at the blades on his/her ceiling fan to get an idea of some indoor air problems. We assume our HVAC system will handle filtering the air, but it missed some, didn't it? Maybe we need to check and change the filters more often or upgrade to better filters. When was the last time you looked into any of the ductwork? We have seen everything in ductwork from lint and hair to mold to original construction debris to even beer cans! (*That can't be good to breathe!*) You may have your HVAC system on a standard maintenance program, but that usually involves mechanical and electrical servicing only, not actual cleaning of the ductwork or heating/cooling units. Also be sure to have the condensation lines and drain checked for blockage to prevent mold problems originating there.

**Tip: AFTERDISASTER's IAQ/Duct Cleaning Division does the full cleaning of an HVAC system!**

Detecting and correcting any of these problems can help you prevent many disasters in your home. But if disaster does occur, call **AFTERDISASTER** for superior fire, water, and mold disaster mitigation and repair service. ■