



## Safety In The Home

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census shows a 24% increase in lone-person households over the past 50 years. That equates to 1 in 10 Australians living alone. Regularly, in current affairs headlines, there are very tragic stories of people being found dead in their homes, where it had taken a considerable length of time for anyone to take action. There is a lot of blame directed at large corporate organisations such as post office or facility meter readers, or even the local councils, for not noticing any tell-tale signs. The simple truth is that sometimes people live alone, either by their own choice or reasonable life circumstances, it does not necessarily signify isolation or an undesirable living arrangement.

One outcome that these media stories have – is the increase in public concern and awareness. This can be a powerful and positive force in the community, and should make us all more aware of our neighbour's welfare. Without encroaching on your neighbour's privacy, we can all play a part in making this a more compassionate society. If you notice mail piling up in the letterbox, for instance, could raise alarm bells that something is not quite normal. If the lights don't turn on at night or the phone rings off the hook, ask around to see if other neighbours may know if the tenant is on holidays or not.

On your own part, bear in mind these facts and always let someone know if you are planning to take a holiday.

For people that live in rural areas where properties are often isolated – individuals should consider establishing a recognisable 'trouble signal' with your neighbours:- such as a loud bell, or a constantly sounding car horn, in the event of an accident.

This fact sheet will act as a reminder to consider your own safety (and those close to you) in your home.

For personal safety services such as a daily phone call to your residence, please see our fact sheet on "**Personal Alarms**" and services.

## Accidents are more common than you think:

Injuries in the home are very common. Most of the injuries of older people and children under five occur at home. Many people are encouraged to alter their home to try to reduce such injuries. Common alterations include: improvement of lighting in halls and stairways, making sure steps and stairs have safety rails to hang on to, and that steps have adhesive non-slip strips.

- ⊕ Consider asking the Gas or Electricity Company to turn the hot water temperature to 50 degrees, as this will prevent most accidental scalds.
- ⊕ Have a safety switch fitted to the power supply, this will prevent a fatal electric shock.
- ⊕ Touchlights are good to have beside the bed – you don't have to fumble in the dark to find a switch.

Always switch on a light if you have to get up in the night – it's easy to fall over in the dark. Alternatively buy night lights that you can fit into a socket – there are some that turn on automatically when you move close to them.

- ⊕ Don't stand on furniture to reach high objects – rather, invest in a small stepladder, it will be much more stable.
- ⊕ Keep floor clear of obstacles, like cords from heaters or fans – if possible, it is recommended to fix extension cords along your skirting boards. Make sure rugs are secured with a non-slip backing, and place non-slip mats inside your bathtub and shower.

With increasing power costs, Hot Water Bottles have a renewed popularity for warmth, comfort, or to assist in alleviating injuries. Remember that hot water bottles wear out. If you are using an older hot water bottle make sure it is still safe. ***If in doubt throw it out.***

“A number of problems with the use of hot water bottles arise too frequently. Those include:

- ⊕ People filling the bottles with boiling water. If the bottle leaks or bursts the very hot water may cause severe burning.
- ⊕ People using hot water bottles that are old. The rubber will deteriorate or perish, and this may cause the bottle to split or burst.
- ⊕ People filling bottles too rapidly, or overfilling the bottle. Spillages and splashing when filling the bottle can also cause burns.
- ⊕ People leaving the hot water bottles in bed overnight. Bottles should be used to warm the bed and not left in all night. This is particularly dangerous with infants and children.”

[www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/Consumers/Product\\_and\\_service\\_safety/General\\_products/Hot\\_water\\_bottles.html](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/Consumers/Product_and_service_safety/General_products/Hot_water_bottles.html)

**TIP:** For information on products that might make your life a little easier and /or more comfortable contact the Independent Living Centre NSW ph: 1300 885 886 [www.ilcsw.asn.au](http://www.ilcsw.asn.au)

*(An information centre about equipment, products and home design for everyday living)*

## Compact fluorescent lightbulbs

Mercury content: CFLs contain small amounts of mercury which is a toxic metal. This metal may be released if the bulb is broken, or during disposal.

The mercury in compact fluorescent lightbulbs poses no threat while in the bulb, but if you break one:

- open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more
- use a wet rag to clean it up and put all of the pieces, and the rag, into a plastic bag
- place all materials in a second sealed plastic bag
- call your local recycling center to see if they accept this material, otherwise put it in your local trash.

Wash your hands afterward.

CFL bulbs may legally be disposed of with regular trash. As long as the waste is sent to a modern municipal landfill, the hazard to the environment is limited. However, the best solution is to save spent CFLs for a community household hazardous waste collection, which would then send the bulbs to facilities capable of treating, recovering or recycling them. For more information on CFL disposal or recycling, contact your local council. (Information resourced from [www.eartheasy.com](http://www.eartheasy.com) )

## Fire safety:

New South Wales Fire Brigades Statistics reveal:

1. The 65 years and over age group represents over 31% of all fire death victims.
2. The risk of fire fatality to people 65 years and over is nearly three times greater than that of the general community.

It is a legal requirement in NSW to have smoke alarm in every residential property where people sleep. Smoke alarms should be installed in the living area and in the hallway near bedrooms – The NSW Fire Brigades recommends the use of photoelectric smoke alarms, which are less prone to false alarms caused by cooking.

**SABRE** (Smoke Alarm Battery Replacement for the Elderly) is a community program where a representative of the local NSW Fire Brigade installs the client’s smoke alarm or batteries at no installation cost.

To be eligible for this assistance you must live in a situation with limited domestic support. This means those persons without family, relatives or friends who are able to assist.

If you would like to know more about this program or their safety tips, your closest fire station, or obtain some of their fact sheets – call NSW Fire and Rescue head office (02) 9265 2999. [www.fire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fire.nsw.gov.au)

## Electrical Safety Switch:

CSIRO "Australian National Fire Incident Statistics 1993-1994" reveals that:

***Over half of all national fires occur in the home and the majority of these are electricity related.***

***“Strong evidence suggests that had safety switches been installed, 90% of electrical fatalities and serious accidents in the home would not have occurred”.*** (Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector 2002)

[www.brilliantelectrical.com.au/hs\\_tips.html](http://www.brilliantelectrical.com.au/hs_tips.html)

A safety switch (also known as a residual current device or RCD) is an electrical device that can detect electrical currents flowing through the body. They swing into action within 30 milliseconds - less than a human heart beat. A shock will still be felt, momentarily, for the short time the current flows through the body until the safety switch operates. Electric shocks are usually painful.

Surge protectors and safety switches play entirely different roles. Surge protectors protect electrical appliances and safety switches protect people. Surge protectors safeguard your wiring and electrical appliances from voltage surges such as lightning strike.

Faults can occur in appliances, tools and wiring, through wear and tear, dampness, poor design or shoddy installation. Undetected, these faults could eventually cause a fire, property damage or personal injury. Because of their sensitivity, safety switches provide a means of early fault detection.

Safety switches are not the same as fuses or circuit breakers but rather an additional form of protection to be used with circuit breakers and fuses. Safety switches monitor the flow of electricity and automatically shut off the electrical supply when current is detected leaking from faulty wiring, switches or electrical appliances. Circuit breakers cut the power off when the wiring has too much electrical current flowing through it. Circuit breakers and fuses do not provide personal protection against electrical shock.

If you haven't already done so, seriously consider installing an electrical safety switch. If you already have a safety switch, be sure to test it every three months and if it fails, have a licensed electrician check it. Also, if your house was built before 1977 it is unlikely to have an earth rod and you should seriously consider having one installed (Information resourced from [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au) ; [www.lets-getaway.com](http://www.lets-getaway.com) )

## Precautions with pets:

People most at risk are the elderly, very young children or people whose immune systems are compromised. This means that they need to be more aware of the risks.

\*Always remember to wash hands after touching pets.

\*Keep animal faeces away from areas where children play or where babies are likely to crawl. Keep sandpits covered.

\*Pregnant women should avoid contact with animal faeces, (be aware when doing gardening), as it can transmit an infection called toxoplasmosis which can seriously affect unborn babies.

\*Never feed your dog raw offal, this meat can carry parasites that can pass onto animals. Your dog in turn, can transmit hydatid disease to humans, which can be fatal.

\*Keep bird cages free from droppings, avoid inhaling dust from cages (this can cause problems in people with allergies and respiratory disease such as asthma). Don't let birds touch your lips, wash hands after handling birds.

**(For further advice, please contact your local veterinarian )**

## Reference List

Independent Living Centre NSW = 1300 885 886

[www.ilcnsw.asn.au](http://www.ilcnsw.asn.au)

NSW Fire and Rescue head office = (02) 9265 2999

[www.fire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fire.nsw.gov.au)

NSW Office of Fair Trading = 13 32 20

[www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)