Fire safety tips for multigenerational households

There are numerous advantages for multiple generations to live under the same roof. Older adults and children are cared for, household costs are shared, an unforeseen job loss is more manageable and perhaps there is money available to put into savings.

“Multigenerational homes are on the rise. In fact, the number of Americans living under the same roof with three or more generations had doubled in the last 40 to 50 years,” said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist. “One way to make your home a safe haven is to reduce fire risk. With National Fire Prevention Week slated in October, it’s a great time to look around your home to ensure you’re taking all fire precautions that will protect all generations living there.”

There are about 360,000 home fires every year in the United States. What can you do to protect your home?

“First and foremost, if you wake up and smell smoke or see flames, get outside immediately. Don’t take time to call 9-1-1 until you’re outdoors,” she said. “If you can’t get outside, call 9-1-1 and let them know you’re trapped inside. If possible, shine a flashlight through the window to help first responders find you quickly.”

Here are some other tips from Peek. Make sure your home has working smoke alarms. There needs to be at least one smoke alarm on every level, as well as one inside and outside of each bedroom. If your home is equipped with hard-wired alarms, interconnect the alarms so that when one sounds, they all sound.

Children and older adults may not hear the smoke alarms. Assign someone to help young children and elderly adults or those with disabilities get out of the home. Peek said in multigenerational households, there may be some residents who are hard of hearing or even deaf.

“If this is the case in your home, install smoke alarms and alert devices designed for individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf. Alert devices such as strobe lights that flash when the smoke alarm sounds or pillow or bed shakers to wake a person who is sleeping,” she said. “The shakers are triggered by the sound of the smoke alarm.”

To make sure your home is ready in the event of a fire emergency, Peek said there are some things families need to do now.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, three of every five home fire deaths results from fires in homes with either no smoke alarms or smoke alarms that were not functional. It is a good idea to replace smoke alarms every 10 years.

“Be sure to test your alarms at least once a month. Press each test button to make sure it’s working,” Peek said. “Develop a fire drill and practice it with every member of the family. Plan your escape and make sure everyone knows different options for getting out of the house. Your plan should include two ways out of every room. Also, designate a place to meet outside to ensure everyone is out of the home.”

Handrails along both sides and the full length of stairs can be a lifesaver when navigating through the stairway, especially if the smoke is getting thick. It is a good idea to keep clutter picked up and out of pathways to avoid falls when trying to exit.

“We always think these things will never happen to us, but this type of situation does happen, and you need to be prepared,” Peek said.

###