

## Spring Cleaning Safety

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Spring is here and we're getting ready to clean up inside our homes and to work outside in our lawns and gardens. But all that lifting, climbing, trimming and other spring-cleaning activities heighten the risk for home injuries. According to the Home Safety Council ([www.homesafetycouncil.org](http://www.homesafetycouncil.org)), there are over 10 million unintentional home injuries in the U.S. per year that result in visits to hospital emergency rooms. These injuries result in over 20,000 deaths per year. Falls and poisonings cause over half of home deaths.

Your safety at home is as important as your safety at work! With that in mind, we offer the following home safety tips:

### Make Your Home Safe from Fires

- Smoke/carbon monoxide detectors- Install UL approved smoke detectors on every level of your home. Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms monthly to make sure they are working. Change the batteries at least once per year.
- Fire Extinguisher- Place a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and other areas of your home. Check the gauge on the extinguisher to make sure that it is fully charged.
- Develop a fire escape plan for your home. Identify two escape routes from each room and have a place to meet outside your home. Practice the fire escape plan with your family.



### Prevent Falls

- **Walkways**
  - Keep stairs, steps, landings and floors clear of toys and clutter.
  - Carry loads so that you can see over them and use the handrail.
  - Safely tuck telephone and electric cords out of walkways.
  - Make sure that area rugs are secured with non-skid pads.
- **Ladders**- If you need to climb, use a ladder (not a chair, table or box):
  - Place stepladders on level ground and open them completely, making sure all locks are engaged.
  - Before using a ladder outdoors, choose a location that is at least 10 feet away from all power lines. Coming in contact with live wires can be fatal.
  - Use the 4-to-1 rule for extension ladders: for each 4 feet of distance between the ground and the upper point of contact (such as the wall or roof), move the base of the ladder out 1 foot from the wall.
  - Always face the ladder when climbing and wear slip-resistant shoes (e.g. those with rubber soles).
  - Keep your body centered on the ladder and gauge your safety by your belly button. If your belly button passes beyond the side rail of the ladder, you are overreaching and at risk for falling.
  - Make sure rungs are dry before using the ladder.
  - Stand at or below the highest safe standing level on a ladder. For a stepladder, the safe standing level is the second rung from the top, and for an extension ladder, it's the fourth rung from the top.



## Be Kind to your Back

Following these lifting techniques can help prevent most back injuries:

- Plan your lift, don't be in a hurry. Look at both the starting and ending point.
- Bend at the knees, not at the waist and keep your back straight. Lift with your strong leg and thigh muscles.
- Keep the object you are lifting close to your body.
- Do not twist at the waist. Move your feet to turn your body when moving objects.
- Get help when lifting very heavy objects (e.g. over 50 pounds)



## Lawn and Garden Safety

- Service lawnmowers and power tools every spring before using them. Make sure that they are in good repair. This includes having the blades sharpened and tightened on the mower. Make sure that all guards are in place.
- Before mowing, walk the lawn and pick up sticks, stones, toys and other debris that could shoot out from the mower or damage the blade.
- Don't let people stand or sit anywhere near where you are mowing. Be especially careful to keep small children away. Do not allow children to ride on lawn tractors/mowers. The safest place for children while the grass is being cut is inside the home.
- Wear proper clothing and protective equipment:
  - Closed-toe shoes with non-slip soles when mowing.
  - Wear eye protection when mowing, using weed wackers/powered equipment.
  - Don't wear any loose clothing that could be caught in moving parts.
  - Wear ear plugs/muffs when using noisy power equipment.
- Never reach under the mower unless it is turned off and the blade has completely stopped turning.
- Store gasoline only in approved containers. Refuel mowers outside when the engine is cool.
- Use fertilizers and insect and weed killers according to the container labels. Keep pets and children off of newly treated areas. Choose integrated pest management or non-toxic products where possible.



## Use Chemicals Safely

- Properly discard out of date medicines.
- Consider using non-toxic cleaners. For example, vinegar and water is an effective window cleaner. Toothpaste works well for polishing silver. Lemon juice is a natural bleach. Baking soda works well on tile and sinks, and when mixed with vinegar it's great for cleaning out drains.
- Consumer Reports has a good list of less toxic cleaners to consider. Go to the website ([www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org)) and search "spring cleaning".
- Read chemical labels and instructions before using cleaning products.
- Wear protective clothing and plastic/rubber gloves when using chemicals. Wear eye protection (e.g. protective goggles) when working with corrosive chemicals.
- Never mix cleaning products. Combinations of certain chemicals (e.g. chlorine and ammonia) can create harmful gases.
- Store household and garden chemicals safely in closed containers out of the reach of children and pets. Use child-proof locks on cabinets. Chemicals with labels using the words "Caution, Danger, Poison, or Keep out of reach of children" should be stored safely and securely away from children.
- Keep medicines and cleaning products in their original containers with their original labels. Always label containers if you must remove chemicals from their original containers.
- Discard hazardous and flammable chemicals that you no longer need. Contact your local Solid Waste Authority to find out when they are having their next "Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Days".



For additional home safety tips, the Home Safety Council website at [www.homesafetycouncil.org](http://www.homesafetycouncil.org) is an excellent source for information. Contact Penn State EHS at (814) 865-6391 if you have any questions about this information.