

Press release

Safety at home: 9 out of 10 fire deaths occur at home PA KFV / BVS: Burglary, accidents, fire - How to protect yourself against the biggest dangers in the coming months

People should feel particularly safe at home. And yet accidents, fires and burglaries happen again and again in one's own four walls. In a press briefing, the experts of the property protection research department of the Austrian Road Safety Board (KFV) and the Fire Prevention Agency (BVS) explain the most common sources of danger at home. Conclusion: With simple means and small changes in one's own behaviour, one can ensure more safety in the coming months.

Vienna, 13 April 2023. "In 2022, 201,100 people in Austria were injured so seriously in their own homes that they had to be treated in a hospital with follow-up care.¹", explains Dr. Armin Kaltenecker, Head of Property Protection at the Austrian Road Safety Board: "We feel particularly comfortable at home, but in our familiar surroundings we become careless and no longer perceive sources of danger as such, such as tripping hazards or behaviour that can encourage a break-in. With the right safety precautions, however, we can prevent many injuries, burglaries or a fire."

Protecting against burglaries during the holiday season

The travel season is approaching, and with it, burglars are once again seeking out abandoned-looking homes and flats. More than 16 burglaries per day happen on average in Austria. "Unfortunately, there is no perfect protection against burglars,"¹ explains Kaltenecker. But to deter burglars, a bundle of measures can be helpful: Especially during the travelling season, attentive neighbours can prevent burglaries by making the property look inhabited. "Simple measures such as emptying the post box and changing the position of blinds or curtains can help," advises Kaltenecker. Other tips include using timers in the evening hours and installing outdoor lighting. It is often also worth investing in a new security door or alarm system.

Too easy entry for burglars

A recent study by KFV on burglaries with locking systems (KFV 2023, n=500) shows that in Austria around 64% of respondents already use a security lock for their entrance door in their house or flat. A difference can be measured between the residents of single and multi-party houses: Only about every second entrance door in apartment buildings is equipped with a security lock (56%), while almost two-thirds in houses have had a security lock installed (72%). For second entrances, e.g. from the cellar or the garage, this number is already lower: only about 35% of the respondents stated that they also had a security lock installed on their second entrance door. Meanwhile, slightly more than 4% of respondents turn their home into a smarthome with an electronic door lock. However, a normal door lock, comparable to those used for interior doors, is still used by more than one fifth for their entrance doors (22%).

"This type of door lock is much easier to break open than those of security doors," warns Kaltenecker. It is also worrying that slightly more than 9% hide their spare key in the vicinity of the entrance door, for example in the garden or in the hallway outside the flat. "This literally opens the door to resourceful burglars and poses a security risk. Around one in ten

¹ Source: KFV (Austrian Road Safety Board), IDB Austria 2022. Injured persons with main residence in Austria whose injury was treated in the accident outpatient department. Extrapolation.

people make it too easy for burglars," warns Kaltenegger. Caution is also advised when using key safes, which 4% of the respondents use: Here, it is essential to pay attention to the high quality of the key safe. The measures to deter burglars and make their "work" more difficult, on the other hand, are clearly having an effect: the number of reports of residential burglaries has been constantly falling for several years. "We see in the figures how important and effective it is to invest in burglary protection and mutual help among neighbours," Kaltenegger emphasises.

Nur keine Hektik: Häufige Unfälle in den eigenen vier Wänden vermeidbar
Vor allem in der Hektik oder bei Multi-Tasking-Versuchen passiert schnell etwas. Nicht zu unterschätzen sind zudem Ablenkungsunfälle bei automatisierten Abläufen: Viele Unfälle, die beim Kochen oder bei Reinigungsarbeiten passieren, sind auf Eile, Unachtsamkeit oder Ablenkung durch äußere Reize zurückzuführen. Am häufigsten passieren Stürze (71%), Zusammenstöße (12%) und Schnitt- und Schlitzverletzungen (7%). Die meisten Unfälle kommen im Wohnzimmer (29%) vor. Auch in der Küche (17%), in Schlafzimmern (15%) oder auf Treppen (15%) passieren viele Unfälle. Am wenigsten verunfallen Menschen im Badezimmer (9%) oder auf der Toilette (2%). Hier gilt aber vor allem Rutschgefahr: Besonders häufig sind in den Nassräumen Stürze. Auch Hitze führt immer wieder zu Verletzungen: Besonders Kleinkinder sind von Verbrühungen und Verbrennungen in den eigenen vier Wänden durch etwa elektrische Koch- und Küchengeräte, heiße Flüssigkeit oder Geschirr betroffen.²

9 out of 10 fire deaths occur at home

This is the sad balance of the Fire Prevention Agency (BVS) on sources of fire danger in the home: "According to this, the highest probability of being confronted with a fire is at home - i.e. where one feels safest," explains Dr. Günther Schwabegger, press spokesman of the BVS. The remaining 10 percent happen in company buildings or special buildings such as homes. More than half of all fires occur in private households, about one third of the fire damage is in the civil sector. 8,297 fires with a minimum damage of 2,000 euros were recorded by the fire damage statistics of the Austrian fire prevention agencies in the fire year 2021, 4,328 fire incidents (52%) were in private households with caused property damage of about 147 million euros (total damage: 403 million euros).

Preventable: Every fire death is one too many

In international comparison, Austria has a relatively low number of fire deaths (51 fire deaths per year 2021/2022, less than 6 fire deaths per year and 1 million inhabitants). In Finland, for example, there are 15 fire deaths per 1 million inhabitants, in Sweden 13, in Hungary 12 and in the USA 10 deaths per 1 million inhabitants. "Nevertheless, every human life lost as a result of a building fire is one too many!" emphasises Schwabegger.

Smoke alarms belong in every household! This becomes even clearer when the number of fire deaths is compared with the number of "preventable fire deaths", which is derived from the individual case assessments of the fire prevention authorities: "This clearly shows that more than one third of all people who lose their lives in the course of a building fire could be saved with the help of simple measures - such as the timely installation of functioning smoke alarms," explains Schwabegger. Therefore, Schwabegger urgently advises to install smoke alarms in every household: Only 44 % of Austrians use smoke alarms in their homes (KFV 2022). "Smoke alarms are an early warning system and can save lives," says Kaltenegger. After all, no matter what ignition source causes a fire - every fire starts small, as Schwabegger explains: "So if you discover the fire in time, it can be extinguished specifically with a fire extinguisher." Every household should therefore also be equipped with a portable

² Source: KFV (Austrian Road Safety Board), IDB Austria 2018. Injured persons with main residence in Austria whose injury was treated in the accident outpatient department. Extrapolation.

6-kg fire extinguisher, which is mounted in an easily accessible central location and regularly checked by specialist companies, Schwabegger calls on.

In case of emergency, it may be too late

A survey by the KfV (2022) shows: Only one in seven households has a fire extinguisher directly in the home. Only about 8% of the available fire extinguishers are in the kitchen. Almost three quarters of Austrians feel capable of operating a fire extinguisher correctly, with men (85%) feeling significantly more competent than women (61%). Incidentally, a total of 44% of Austrians have already used a fire extinguisher (men: 62%; women: 25%) - 11% already once in an emergency. Another 36% have practised using a fire extinguisher. Almost 35% say they have at least informed themselves about the correct handling. 22% have neither experience with fire extinguishers nor have they informed themselves about the correct use of fire extinguishers. There is still a need to catch up here for timely action in case of fire. In addition, it is important to clear escape routes: "Objects that are placed in the hallway, easily topple over, are constricting or combustible can be a tripping hazard in an emergency, force a stronger fire development and thus literally stand in the way of an unhindered escape," warns Kaltenegger. "For example, leaving prams, bicycles or even a pair of shoes in the hallway can be a fire hazard in an emergency and should be avoided."

Every fire starts small

"Even with careful handling of ignition sources: There is always a residual risk," Schwabegger emphasises. In case of fire, the principle of "Alert - Rescue - Extinguish" applies: The emergency number of the fire brigade (122) should be dialled immediately. Then you should rescue yourself and other persons from the danger zone as far as possible. Firefighting follows after alerting the fire brigade and rescuing endangered persons and should only be done as far as the situation allows.

Things worth knowing about smoke alarms

- Fire smoke with its toxic fumes is life-threatening long before the flames! The smoke from the fire obscures visibility and makes escape routes impassable. The loud alarm of the smoke alarm warns already at low smoke concentration and helps to get a decisive head start for the escape from endangered areas and/or for attempts to extinguish the fire.
- Smoke alarms work photo-optically. As soon as enough smoke particles enter the interior of the detector, a signal tone is triggered. At around 85 decibels, it wakes up anyone who is asleep and warns them of the impending danger. Cigarette smoke and burning candles do not trigger an alarm in normal use.
- Smoke alarms do not require wiring. They should always be installed near the ceiling (follow the manufacturer's installation instructions). They should not be installed in the bathroom or directly above a cooking area - the development of steam could trigger false alarms.
- The smoke alarm must have a CE mark (tested according to EN 14604) and ideally also the new quality mark "Q" for increased requirements.
- The test button should be pressed regularly (about 1x per quarter).
- The batteries of conventional smoke alarms should be changed every one to two years. High-quality modern smoke alarms have a battery life of up to 10 years. Audible signals indicate a weak battery.
- Due to the change in building regulations, it is now mandatory in all federal states to equip new buildings (common rooms) with smoke alarms!

Things to know about fire extinguishers

- Powder extinguishers and foam extinguishers are suitable for private households. Due to their universal applicability for all relevant fire classes (A, B, C) in the household, powder

extinguishers are the easiest to handle and achieve excellent extinguishing effects even when used by untrained persons. The extinguishing powder is harmless to humans.

- A 6 kg extinguisher is best suited for household use. Its working time is at least 9 seconds.
- A fire extinguisher for private households has at least two markings: the CE mark and EN 3.
- The extinguisher should be placed in a central and easily accessible location in the flat or house, e.g. in the hallway or entrance hall, porch or porch. Mounted at a handle height of 80 to 120 cm, the fire extinguisher is easily accessible in case of fire.
- Serviced every two years by specialist companies or dealers, the fire extinguisher is reliably ready for use in an emergency.
- The correct handling is described on every fire extinguisher and should be read through before an emergency. Practical extinguishing exercises create safety in handling a fire extinguisher.

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