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Safety in the kitchen

Forty per cent of all the accidents in the home happen in the kitchen. Children under 5 years, and elderly people over 65, are most at risk.

Bad design and faulty maintenance are responsible for some of the risks, but most accidents are due to personal factors such as worry, temper, fatigue, haste and depression in adults, and curiosity and disobedience in children.

The kitchen should have a first aid box or cabinet which should be lockable or kept well out of reach of small children.

Planning

The safest layouts are those where the cooker, work surface and sink are in an unbroken sequence, uninterrupted by doorways. This avoids carrying hot dishes and boiling pans across circulation spaces.

Never position cookers near a window where draughts can extinguish gas flames and where curtains or blinds might catch fire.

Check that fan casings and cooker hoods are positioned according to the manufacturers' recommendations, which must be well above a hob or a high level gas grill. See p. 118.

Drying racks should never be placed over cookers as towels may fall down and catch fire.

All appliances and sinks should be kept well away from inward opening doors, which may bang into the person using them.

A worktop area should be provided both sides of a cooker and should be level with the hob surround. Pan handles should always be parked sideways, out of the reach of small children.

Climbing up on rickety chairs to reach things accounts for many accidents, particularly amongst the elderly who should be provided with a small stepladder or a *kick-step*.

Good lighting of working areas is essential to prevent cuts, burns, scalds and fingers being trapped in moving parts.

Floors must be level, with no steps or raised thresholds, and the finish should be non-slip. Avoid wax polishes which can be slippery when wet. Water, and particularly grease and oil spills, should be mopped up as soon as they occur.

Lack of storage will result in things being left on the floor – such as shopping bags over which people can trip.

Children

Young children should not be allowed to play in the kitchen where their mother can trip over their toys while she is handling boiling pans or sharp knives. Cooks' knives are best hung on magnetic racks rather than drawers which can be accessible to young fingers.

Toddlers must also be prevented from eating and drinking pets' food and water, and putting polythene bags over their heads which can cause swift suffocation.

Bleach, and other household poisons, should be stored in cupboards above worktop level so as to be out of children's reach.

Electrical appliances – safety aspects

A kitchen must be provided with at least four socket outlets above the worktop to cope with small electrical appliances

such as a kettle, food processor, coffee machine and toaster. Where there are inadequate sockets, trailing flexes will result. Twin socket outlets are preferable to single sockets as these will discourage the use of adaptors and consequent overloading of circuits.

Sockets and spur switches must be positioned well away from sink units to reduce the risk of handling with wet hands. They should also not be placed behind hobs, where arms could be burned and sleeves catch fire when reaching over a live burner.

Large appliances built into cabinets have spur switches above the worktop, connected to socket outlets behind the appliances, so that they can be remotely controlled and also be pulled out for servicing.

Gas cookers – safety aspects

Gas cookers are safer if they have automatic ignition, as the burners will light if a child accidentally turns on a control. Some cookers also have automatic re-ignition which re-lights the burner should the flame be accidentally extinguished.

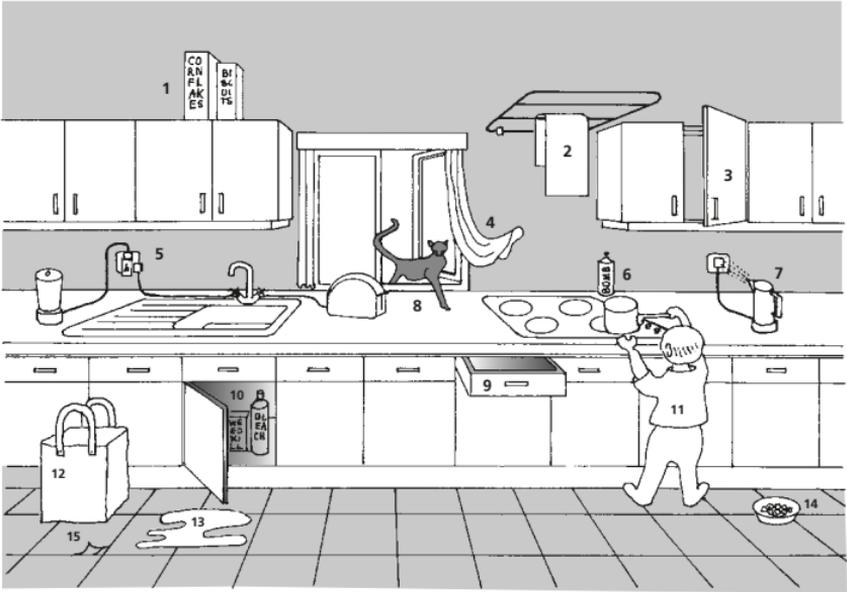
Dealing with fire

Fat catching fire in a pan is one of the most common causes of kitchen fires.

Water should never be poured on to flaming fat as this will spread the flame in an instant.

A fire blanket or an aerosol fire extinguisher should be used to smother the flames and then the burner should be switched off. Failing that, a damp cloth can be draped over the pan to cut off the air, and left in position until cool.

Aerosol cans will explode if they get too hot, and should be stored in a cool place.



- 1 Everyday food out of easy reach
- 2 Cloth drying over hob could fall and catch fire
- 3 Cupboard door left open could bang someone's head
- 4 Hob too near open window – curtains could catch fire
- 5 Socket too near sink and is overloaded with flex trailing behind sink
- 6 Aerosol bomb could explode from heat from hob
- 7 Kettle is playing steam over electric socket
- 8 Cat is going to walk over food preparation worktop
- 9 Drawer full of sharp knives left open to child
- 10 Poisonous substances accessible to child
- 11 Saucepan handle left sticking out for child to reach
- 12 Shopping bag left about on floor – could cause fall
- 13 Spilt liquid not mopped up making floor slippery
- 14 Cat's food left accessible to child
- 15 Unstuck down tile could trip someone up

Disaster kitchen

Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are required by the Building Regulations in all dwellings.

Summarised below are the requirements which pertain to domestic kitchens:

If a dwelling does **NOT** have an automatic fire detection and alarm system, then a suitable number of smoke alarms must be provided. They must be *mains operated* and may have a secondary battery operated power supply.

There must be at least one *smoke alarm* on each floor. They should be *linked* so that the alarm signal operates in all locations.

They should be sited so that there is a smoke alarm in the circulation space within 7.5 m of every habitable room.

Where a *kitchen area* is **NOT** separated from a stairway or circulation space by a door, there should be a compatible inter-linked *heat detector* in the kitchen, in addition to whatever smoke alarms are needed in the circulation spaces.

Smoke alarms should be *ceiling mounted* and at least 300 mm from walls and light fittings.

They may also be *wall mounted* provided they are above the level of any doorways opening into the space.

Smoke alarms must be easily *accessible* for maintenance, testing and cleaning.

Smoke alarms should **NOT** be fixed in *cooking areas* where steam, condensation or fumes could give false alarms.

Source: Building Regulations – Approved Document B