



Fire Safety Tips for Snowbirds

Snowbird is a term used to reference people that migrate from the northern states to the southern states for the winter. Here are some safety tips for Snowbirds to keep their homes, apartment, or condos fire safe while they are gone.

Snowbirds Tips

- Repair pipe and roof leaks and make sure appliances that use water are in good condition. Leaks of any kind can grow in size and eventually find their way in to outlets, light switches, electrical panels, light fixtures, smoke alarms, and other electrical appliances that can short out and cause a fire.
- To prevent indoor pipes from bursting, you can turn off the water supply and drain the water from the pipes. To ensure pipes are drained properly, hire a trusted plumber. Do not turn off your pipes if you have a residential fire sprinkler system installed in your home. Before your leave, contact a licensed residential fire sprinkler company to make sure your system is in working order. If you do not want to turn off the water supply to your home, you can turn off the water to your washing machine, dishwasher, and water heater to prevent water supply lines from bursting.
- Properly drain outdoors pipes and turn off outdoor faucets. Make sure the main water valve to your home is in working order.
- Make sure your sump pump is in working order. A flooded lower level of your home is also a fire hazard. Install an emergency battery backup according to the manufactures instructions or hire a professional to install it. In areas that have a municipal water supply, there is the option to install a backup water powered system.
- Prevent ice dams from forming. When ice and snow melts on your roof, water gets trapped behind the ice dam and causes damage to your roof. Water can drain through

the damage caused by the ice dams. Ice dams can cause a fire the same way a leak from a pipe can. Arrange for a company to monitor and remove ice dams while you are out of town and/or have a trusted roof company assess your roof and insulation to see if the ice dams can be prevented.

- Have a trusted heating/HVAC company inspect your heating system no matter what type you have in your home. When a heating system is not maintained, it can become a fire hazard or fail causing pipes to freeze. Change the furnace filters even if you have done so recently. If your heating ducts have not been cleaned after a remodel project or in three to five year, have them cleaned. Heating ducts that have a buildup of dust, debris, or particles in them can spread a fire rapidly through the home.
- Keep the temperature inside your home at 55°F or higher, especially in regions that experience subzero temperatures for long periods of time. The heat in your home should be able to reach the concealed spaces in your floors, wall cavities, and other areas where water pipes are located.
- Reduce or get rid of things that are stacked high, items that are piled up, or that are leaned up against each other. Any items that are stacked, piled, or leaned have the potential to start a fire when they shift or collapse. When items move, they can fall against outlets, appliances, and cords. Fires can start when heat from appliances or light bulbs is trapped or when combustible items come in contact with electricity.
- Mice, rats, squirrels, and other critters can be tiny fire starters by chewing on wiring or knocking items over. The best way to prevent fires caused by rodents is to keep them out of the house and to protect the wiring on the outside of your home. Seal cracks in windows and around doors, fill holes and gaps in the foundation and around pipes. Enclose or protect the wiring in your garage and the outside of your home. Keep in mind, low voltage wiring can cause fires the same ways high voltage does including critter chewing. You can also hire a trusted pest control company to take care of the creatures that may already be living inside your home and to keep the rest of the pests out.
- To keep larger animals like raccoons out of your chimney, put a cap over your chimney. To keep out the mice and smaller animals, make sure the flue is shut before you leave.
- Make sure there are smoke alarms on all levels of your home, inside and outside of the sleeping areas, and places where people sleep or catch the occasional nap. Change the batteries in alarms without 10 year lithium batteries and test all smoke alarms regardless of the type of batteries they have. Even if you do not have an alarm system that is monitored by an off-site monitoring company, a smoke alarm sounds loud enough so it can be heard by a neighbor or passerby from the outside of your home. If

you are a Snowbird, it is recommended to have an off-site monitored smoke alarm system installed.

- To keep your home protected from fire while you are away, you can consider installing a residential fire sprinkler system. If you are going to build a smaller home consider installing a residential fire sprinkler system. If you are moving, make sure you purchase or rent a home, condo, or apartment that already has a fire sprinkler system installed. Residential fire sprinkler systems are installed to protect lives. When a fire sprinkler head activates, it cools down the fire and prevents the deadly occurrence of flashover, however, in most cases the fire is also extinguished. Most Snowbirds with fire sprinkler systems in their homes have them monitored by an off-site monitoring company or have installed a horn and strobe on the outside of their homes so the neighbors can be alerted if a fire sprinkler has been activated.
- Unplug small appliances and electronics (including computers) to prevent fires. Keep in mind that even if you are not using the appliance or electronic, the indication light, illuminated logo, or built in timer is still drawing power.
- Remove dead trees or large overhanging limbs that have the potential to fall and destroy your home, pull down power lines and start a fire, or damage the gas meter and cause an explosion. Hire a tree company that has a certified arborist on staff. Many tree companies operate all year round.
- Arsonists and vandals look for the same opportunities that burglars do. Secure your home and protect your property. Make sure doors, windows, sliding doors, and doggie doors are locked or secured. Make the home looked lived in, install an outdoor light with a motion-sensor, and put indoor lights on timers. Stop mail, package, and newspaper deliveries. Arrange to have your sidewalk shoveled and driveway plowed. Not only will this make it appear that someone is home, but it will prevent someone from slipping or falling on your property. Do not post your vacation or travel plans on social media sites and definitely do not include the dates or days you will be gone or returning. Ask your neighbors to keep their ears open and a watchful eye on your home while you are gone.
- Research all the different types of technology there are available to help you keep a watchful eye on the smoke alarms, appliances, heating system, water pipes, and the interior and exterior of your home. There are many affordable options.
- As you leave your home, close the doors to every room. A regular household door can slow down the spread of fire by containing it to the room it started in. There have been documented cases of fires that have either stayed contained to the room where the fire started or of fires that have used up the oxygen in a room and put themselves out.

- When you come back home, check the dryer vent on the outside of the home and the chimney to make sure a bird or critter has not built a nest or stored food in either one. Check the electrical panel to see if any circuits were tripped, do not turn the circuit back on until a licensed electrician has looked at it. When you open the door to your home, if you smell gas, smoke, or any unusual smell leave the home and call 9-1-1.