

3. Cottage fire safety. Heating method, CO and smoke alarms

Your home away from home – is it fire safe? Cottage and Cabin fire safety

We all look forward to escaping for some rest and relaxation at our summer properties, but is your cottage or cabin fire safe?

Although your cottage or cabin is your place to play and relax and get away from it all, it's also prone to fire safety issues. Never forget that your home away from home is still a home, and you must take fire safety precautions to protect you and your family. As you will be sleeping, cooking and living in your cottage/cabin, you should take the same fire safety measures as you would in your home.

Just like your house, a cottage or cabin needs an escape plan. Take the time to draw a detailed map of your cottage or cabin, noting where all the doors and windows are. Plan out your two escape routes and practise how you would get out in the event of a fire. Ensure your guests know the escape plan.

Know where you are and how to be found

Your cottage or cabin may be out of the way and difficult for guests or the Fire Department to locate – which creates its own challenges. You may not be used to explaining under stress how to get to your cottage, so have written directions on hand, along with any municipal address or official land location, in case you have to describe the route. To help emergency responders find your cottage, your address number on an identifying sign should be visible from the road. Check throughout the summer to make sure plants or shrubs have not covered and obscured the sign.

Communications and Vehicle Access

You won't want to jump in the lake with your keys and cellphone in your pocket, but make sure you at least keep them in a readily accessible place when they're not on you. Know the telephone number of the local fire department and have it posted, along with address and directions, in the cottage and added to your phone's contacts list.

Smoke and CO alarms are cottage essentials, too

The best practises for installing smoke alarms in a cabin are the same as in any other home. You must have smoke alarms installed on each storey and between the sleeping rooms of the cabin. We recommend that you install also install smoke alarms in each sleeping room.

A carbon monoxide (CO) alarm is also an important safety feature, especially in cabins, where wood-burning stoves and heaters are common. In a dwelling with a fuel-burning appliance (gas, propane, wood or pellet stove, fireplace, furnace, water heater, etc.), a CO alarm should be installed within five metres of each bedroom door.

Smoke and CO alarms should be tested every time you visit the cottage. Remember to replace the batteries at least annually or purchase alarms with long-life (ten year) batteries.

First spring visit to the cottage?

Before you have that first summer barbecue or light the first fire, make sure your barbecues and heating appliances are free of debris and animal intruders and repair any damage that have may occurred over the winter months. Test your smoke and CO alarms to ensure they are functioning.

Clear the driveway of bushes and overhanging branches – emergency vehicles are wider and taller than your car.

Headed back to work?

When you leave your cottage/cabin to head back to work or are shutting down for the winter, there are some measures you can take to reduce fire risk while you're away.

- Ensure your fire is completely out before you leave. Empty the cold ashes out of the fireplace and extinguish campfires with plenty of water.
- Unplug electrical appliances from outlets.
- Store fuel, firewood and other combustible materials at least 10 metres away from the main buildings.
- Keep roof and rain gutters free of debris to reduce the risk from an errant spark from a wildfire or a fire at a neighbouring property.