

2. Motor homes and RV fire safety

What do you know about RV fire safety?

Tips for keeping your home away from home safe for your family

Alberta's wide open spaces make for some great recreational vehicle trips. But before you take the RV out to tour the badlands, check out the mountains or explore the north, have you checked to make sure your home on the road is fire safe?

It's easy to forget that in addition to being a vehicle to get you from point A to point B, an RV is also a fully inhabitable space, with all the inherent hazards that come with it. There's cooking and heating happening within a structure with a multiple tanks of fuel attached to it, which, if you're not careful, can lead to some serious safety consequences for you and your family.

Have a plan

Having an emergency escape plan applies to your RV as well as to your home. For your safety, draw an escape plan of your RV that identifies two ways out. The first way out would be the door you typically use to enter, while the second way out could be a back door, a large window that opens or an escape hatch on the roof with a way to reach it if you need to get out.

When you take your RV out on the road for the first time, test all escape windows, hatches and doors to make sure they work properly. Keep escape routes clear of obstructions, and remember that in the event of a fire, the space is small and you're going to need to get yourself and your family out quickly.

Should you be alarmed?

At least one smoke alarm and one carbon monoxide alarm should be installed in your RV near the sleeping area. Depending on the size and layout of your RV, more than one alarm may be needed. Special 12-volt alarms, designed for use in RVs, are available from specialized retailers. Test all alarms weekly when the RV is in use.

For further safety, install a propane leak alarm at floor level, no more than 15 centimetres above the floor. Propane gas tends to pool in low-lying spots, and even a small spark can ignite it.

Where am I?

Heading out for the weekend for some relaxation? Check the emergency numbers for the area where you're headed. Some remote areas do not have 911 service or even cellphone service.

It is crucial to know your location. Will you be able to tell emergency responders where you are? Confirm the address, and take note of your surroundings so that you are able to provide a description of where you are if you need to call for help.

Use appliances properly

Never use cooking appliances for heating the inside of your RV. When using the stove in your RV, open an overhead vent or window to allow carbon monoxide gases out. Similarly, propane

lanterns should be used only as a light source, not as a space heater. Always select a level surface to place your lantern on.

Store clothes, linens and combustible items well away from the kitchen area. Exercise caution when cooking in your RV, as combustibles such as paper towels are likely closer to the stove.

If you're using a generator, make sure the exhaust pipes extend past the side walls or rear of the RV. Generators produce carbon monoxide, and you don't want to have it drawn back into the RV.

Fuel safety

Propane cylinders should be stored outside of your RV, including small cylinders designed for lanterns and camp stoves, however cylinders should not be mounted on the roof of an RV. Cylinders mounted on the back of an RV are also a hazard in the event of a rear-end collision.

Exercise care when refueling your propane tanks. It is important to shut off all interior burners, pilot lights, appliances and the RV's engine.