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4 Dangerous Home Mistakes

by [Madeline Haller](#) May 9, 2012, 05:00 am EDT

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Can't remember the last time you checked to see if your smoke alarm was working? The latest research shows you're not alone.



Lint? What's lint?

One in three households said they had a working smoke detector on every floor when they actually didn't, according to a study published in the journal *Injury Prevention*. Researchers visited over 600 houses in Baltimore, Maryland conducting interviews and home observations to determine the results.

Yes, we realize that this is a small study. But when is the last time you checked to see if yours was working? To get you back on track, we broke down the top four tasks you're neglecting to do around your pad. (To be prepared for any emergency, know these [5 Essential First-Aid Tips](#).)

Your mistake: You haven't checked your smoke alarm in months

"Twenty-three percent of all residential fire deaths in the U.S. occur in homes where the alarm was present but not functioning," says Wendy Shields, M.P.H., lead study author and an assistant scientist with the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy. "So taking to time to make sure these units work can literally save your life." Check the batteries every 6 months—just put a reminder in your iPhone. If you know you'll forget, swap your alkaline batteries for 10-year lithium batteries.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, your best bet is to install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, and to make sure there's an alarm outside every separate sleeping area in the house. (That's not the only upgrade you should make. Learn [How Your Home Is Making You Fat](#).)

Your mistake: You've never looked under your fridge—let alone cleaned it

Under your refrigerator is a set of coils and a cooling fan that you should clean every few months, says Chris Hall, home maintenance expert and president of RepairClinic.com.

"Refrigerators remove heat from the inside and that heat is dissipated through a radiator-like appliance located on the bottom/back on the unit," says Hall. If those coils get dirty, then they can't give off the heat as efficiently as if they were clean—which ultimately means you're spending more money on your electric bill, he explains. Your move: Unplug the refrigerator and move the unit away from the wall. The coils may look like a grate or like a wide radiator, explains Hall. Once you locate them, use a long-handled bristle brush to reach those hard to reach spots and a vacuum cleaner to suck up anything left under your fridge's normal location.

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Your mistake: You haven't cleaned your stove . . . ever

"Cleaning is the most important thing when it comes to your stove, because failing to do so can become a fire hazard," says Hall. Clean your stove with a nonabrasive cleaner in between each use—or at least every week or two.

Same goes for the drip pans (or drip bowls) on top of the stove. Replace them every 2 to 3 years. "Once they're stained, it's usually not possible to clean them completely," says Hall. Either shop for the exact part that fits your individual unit, or replace them with a [universal pan or bowl](#).

Your mistake: You've never cleaned out the venting on your dryer.

See that tube that hooks on to the back of the unit that runs to the outside of the house? It needs to be detached and cleaned at least once a year to avoid a fire risk, says Terry Spencer, technical home maintenance expert of RepairClinic.com. (Your body also needs regular upkeep—like these [5 Do-It-Yourself Medical Tests](#).)

First, pull your dryer away from the wall and disconnect the vent tube from the back of the dryer. Remove any of the lint that has gathered near the opening.

Then move onto the vent ducting (the section running outdoors). "We recommend using [special vent cleaning brushes](#), which make the job easier and can reach the sometimes long distances from the machine to the outside wall," says Spencer. Insert the brush and push through the ducting in order to break loose any blockage and pull out any collected lint.

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