

Fall fire safety around the home

Kee your property safe by removing fire hazards around your home. Homes can catch fire and burn because "fuels," which can take many forms, frequently are located too close to a building.

Although we are far from the mountains, Davis faces many of the same fire hazards found in mountainous areas. For example, pine needles are a common sight in Davis yards. When allowed to build up on the ground or on rooftops, this dry material can be ignited easily by a heat source. Leaves, dry and dead plants, and other organic debris from yards can be highly combustible as well. This is especially true after the summer heat has dried out this type of debris.

What should you do? Prevention is the best solution. Take a look at your yard and outdoor areas around your house. Try to identify potential hazards or combustible materials that could be ignited easily. A few items to check include:

- Pine needles, leaves, or other debris more than one or two inches deep. Areas to watch closely are the roof, rain gutters and side yards that you may not visit frequently.

- Dead or dying vegetation. This would include vines and similar woody plants that have been allowed to grow without trimming during the summer.

- Overgrown and untrimmed trees and bushes. One type of tree frequently overlooked as a severe fire hazard is the palm tree. Unless trimmed periodically to remove the dry fronds, burning palm trees produce a tremendous amount of heat and airborne burning material. Such burning embers, called "brands," have been known to ignite houses hundreds of feet from the original tree fire.

- Lumber, oil, paint and similar material stored next to the house should be taken to the landfill or recycled. For information on recycling household materials, visit www.davisrecycling.org.

Once you have assessed the fire potential around your home, it's time to remedy the situa-

tion. Rake up and remove organic material such as pine needles, grass and weeds. Prune trees and bushes to keep them away from your house. If properly arranged on the street, Davis Waste Removal will collect most yard waste material during its normal pick-up cycle. Yolo County Landfill has specific days when you can drop off household hazardous waste. Call (530) 666-8729 for drop-off dates.

Keeping unneeded combustible materials at a minimum around the house will help ensure the safety of one of your most valuable possessions: your home. Remember, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Home fire safety

One of the most important devices you can buy for your home is a smoke detector. However, without proper maintenance, the smoke detector cannot do its job of waking you and your family during a fire.

Smoke detector

Guidelines for keeping the smoke detector in good working condition include:

- Test smoke detectors once a month.
- When you change the clock, change the batteries in the smoke detectors.
- Clean the detectors by vacuuming them at the same time you test them.
- Never remove the batteries from a smoke detector to use in other appliances.

Plan your escape

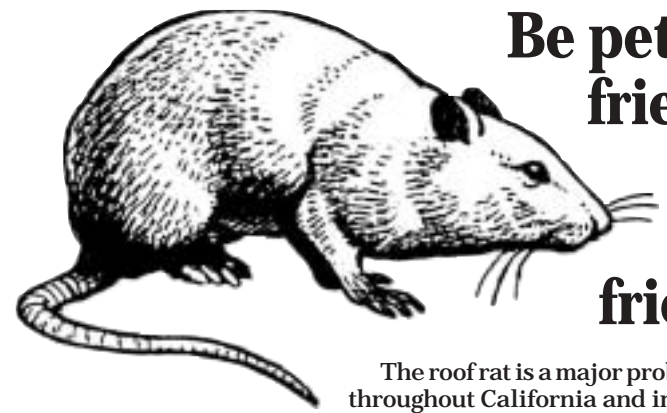
You should never practice escaping from the house while the house is on fire. The time to practice is before an emergency occurs. Following are some guidelines for EDITH (Exit Drills In The Home):

- Plan and practice fire escape routes, and make sure everyone knows two ways out of every room.
- Have a safe meeting place planned ahead of time, once you are out of the house.
- Never go back into the house for anything when there is a fire.
- Teach your children not to hide from the firefighters but instead to yell out loud to let firefighters know where they are.

almost no smoke, minimal ash, and require less firewood. Older uncertified stoves and fireplaces release 40 to 60 grams of smoke per hour, while new EPA-certified stoves produce only 2 to 5 grams of smoke per hour.

Breathing smoke is unhealthy. Wood smoke contains a mixture of gases and fine particles that can cause burning eyes, runny nose and bronchitis. Fine particles can aggravate heart or respiratory problems, such as asthma, in people of all ages. Even limited exposure to smoke can be harmful to human health, particularly to that of children, the elderly, and people with chronic conditions.

Replace your old equipment with an EPA-certified wood stove. In addition to the health benefits, it will save you money, reduce the risk of fire, and improve air quali-



Be pet-friendly, not rat-friendly

The roof rat is a major problem species throughout California and in Davis. Roof rats can damage your house, cause disease and wreak havoc on your garden. Many residents unknowingly attract rats to their property by leaving food outside for pets, failing to trim trees and greenery, and neglecting to discard fallen fruit.

The roof rat, or *rattus rattus*, is agile and slender, with a tail longer than the head and body combined. Roof rats frequently enter buildings and can move about neighborhoods by using utility lines and fences as runways. The roof rat prefers to feed on fruits, nuts, ivy and pet food commonly found in residential backyards. Another local rat, the Norway rat, has a heavier, bulkier body and is slightly larger than the roof rat. This species nests in underground burrows and will feed on discarded fish, fish bait, garbage, meat scraps and cereal grains.

Rats and their fleas are capable of transmitting a variety of human diseases. Murine typhus is a rat-borne disease that exists in certain areas of California. This disease can be transmitted by rat fleas. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a deadly disease that is transmitted through urine, droppings or saliva. Humans contract the disease by breathing in the virus when present in the air. Rat-bite fever is a systemic bacterial illness that can be contracted through the bite or scratch of a rodent, or the ingestion of food or water contaminated with rat feces.

How can you tell if you have rats as unwanted visitors? First, look for signs of rat activity—damaged, partially eaten fruits; broken snail shells under bushes or nest sites; signs of gnawing on plastic, wood or rubber materials; greasy run marks caused by the rat's fur; rat droppings, dark in color, spindle shaped and about 1/2-inch long; and burrows in the ground and adjacent to sewer lines.

To prevent a problem or to keep one from spreading, harvest fruits as soon as they ripen and pick up all fallen fruit; never leave uneaten pet food outside overnight; seal pet food in metal storage containers if stored in a garage or outside; keep palm trees and yucca plants well trimmed; trim and keep ivy, oleander, bougainvillea and other thickly matted plants away from roofs, walls, fences and trees; store wood and lumber piles at least 18 inches from the ground and 12 inches from the walls; and repair leaky faucets and eliminate standing water.

Rats can be trapped in several ways. Wood "snap traps" are inexpensive and prevent the rat from dying in an inaccessible area. Effective baits are peanut butter mixed with oatmeal, bacon, nutmeats, pieces of apple, or chocolate candy. Traps should be placed in high rat traffic areas. Chemical control methods can also be used, but be sure to purchase only licensed commercial brands from farm supply stores, nurseries and hardware stores.

For more information, contact the Sacramento Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District at (916) 440-0826.

Don't let your money — or your health — go up in smoke

Do you have an old woodstove or insert? Before the cold weather hits, change to a more efficient, cleaner-burning appliance. Today's wood stoves and inserts offer improved safety and efficiency, and decrease the health risks from wood smoke. They produce

ty inside and outside your home.

For information on woodstove replacement programs and possible incentives this fall, contact the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District at (800) 287-3650, or visit www.ysaqmd.org.

