

around the HOUSE

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How Safe Is Your Home? (Part II)

Staying safe at home can be as simple as picking up clutter lying around. Other times things require a bit more thought and planning.

Last month, Part I looked at how you can make the exterior and entry areas of your home safer for everyday living. Part II takes a look at other areas that could present problems and what to do about them.

Drop Zone

In an effort to keep things within reach on the way out the door, some people (including me) may end up with piles of clutter near the entry areas of the home.

This can be a tripping hazard.

A new feature for the home is the introduction of room or space near the entry called a “drop zone” or “dump zone.” This is an area dedicated to charging electronic devices and the location of day-to-day gizmos, accessories and clothing we grab on the way out the door.

This area is also a home safety feature as it places all these items in an orderly location. By having a central electronic charging point, no cords are strung about the entry area that can also be a tripping hazard. I’ll now provide this convenient feature in all new home designs.

What’s Cooking?

The majority of domestic accidents occur in the kitchen and bathroom.

Remember to remove all loose throw rugs. When rugs are still pre-

ferred, select those that have a non-slip floor surface. Avoid using floor polish or wax in order to reduce slick surfaces and to reduce the possibility of slipping. Keep commonly used kitchen items within easy reach and



An easily removable decorative panel conceals the sink’s plumbing lines. If pipes are exposed, they should be covered to protect from scalding.

make sure appliance cords are out of the way.

The overall light level in the kitchen should be good, and is an increased benefit for older eyes. If glare is a problem, try and minimize

Thick carpet is an obstacle for wheelchairs and can easily throw a person off balance if they use a walker.

shiny surfaces. In extreme cases you may want to consider an adhered slightly polarized window film that can be placed on the actual window.

At the kitchen sink, make sure the under-sink pipes are covered to protect from scalding pipes. This is a must for

those who use a wheelchair and are able to roll under the kitchen sink.

Hot Stuff

Is there a clear and adequate surface area adjacent to the microwave and wall ovens to set hot plates and pots on when removing food? I like to design pull-out countertops located near ovens for this purpose.

If finding a clear unobstructed surface on which to set hot pots is a problem in your existing kitchen, consider a “countertop on wheels.” This is a table that has casters that can roll and lock in place. It can have shelves built in for transportation of plates, utensils, laptop or any other items. Make sure your kitchen has a per-

manent area for it so it doesn’t become another obstacle.

One of the safest new appliances in the kitchen is the induction cooktop. It will only heat a ferrous pan (if it attracts a magnet, it is ferrous), but not the cooktop surface itself. A ceramic or glass cooking bowl will not heat on these cooktops.

The obvious advantage is that a flame or a red-hot electric heating coil is not present, avoiding the possibility of burns or fires. A universally designed kitchen is also a safer kitchen.

Refer to *Around the House* in the June and August 2011 issues of *PN* for more information about Universal Designed (UD) kitchens. They are also available at universaldesignonline.com.

Squeaky Clean

When it’s time for new kitchen and bathroom floors, they should be

replaced with nonslip flooring. Ask your floor contractor for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant flooring that meets the required coefficient of friction.

Replace the bathroom privacy lock with one that can also be opened from the outside in case of emergency.

The problem with a swing door that opens in is that if someone falls inside the door it may swing into the fallen person. This is one of the reasons I design pocket doors into bathrooms. Provide an open loop handle on the door to make it easier to open. The door needs to be two-feet, ten-inches clear from door jamb to door jamb for wheelchair access.

Every bathroom should have a night light. New products have a blue colored LED light that is nice, as it doesn't startle you when you flip it on in the dark. It is designed so the cool blue light does not interrupt your sleep as a bright light can, when you go back to bed.

If you have thick carpeting with cushioning in the hallway, remove it as it may also be a tripping hazard.



Grab bars are usable by everyone—wheelchair user or not—but are especially helpful for people with mobility issues. Avoid those with suction cups and make sure that when installed they can resist a vertical and horizontal force of 250 pounds.

Thick carpet is an obstacle for wheelchairs and can easily throw a person off balance if they use a walker.

Provide handles or bars in showers and adjacent toilets. Grab bars are usable by everybody and especially helpful for wheelchair and ambulatory older users.

So many stylish and colorful products are available; they don't have to look institutional anymore. Avoid grab bars with suction cups and make sure that when installed they can resist a vertical and horizontal force of 250 pounds.

There are comfort height toilets, and if the 16½-inch height is not high enough, install a toilet riser at the bottom of the stool or an actual seat that may be four inches high.

A handheld shower and shower seat are simple affordable solutions that will make your shower experience more relaxing and less dangerous.

More Resources

These are only a few suggestions, and there are many more that will help make your home a safer place. A good website to learn more about home safety and preventing falls is www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/cosumer/10242.html.

At the back of the plan book *Universal Design Smart Homes for the 21st Century* there is also a 25-page room-by-room features and benefits section that explains the features of UD; many of them are safety features, too.

Charles Schwab's book, Universal Design Smart Homes for the 21st Century, is available at a \$5 discount for PN readers by using coupon code "UDHomes" or "Vethomes." It is available at universaldesignonline.com.

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