



BEYOND THE LETTERBOX

UP IN FLAMES

Stay safe in your home this Summer and throughout 2013. Every year there are around 11,000 house fires and sadly, many people continue to lose their lives instead of taking some simple precautions.

Your Home

- Test that smoke alarms are working
- Be alert when cooking and never leave food unattended
- Never leave lit cigarettes or candles to burn unattended
- Never leave children unattended with candles, matches and lighters
- Have a locked cupboard for combustible materials and dangerous tools
- Don't overload electrical circuits with too many appliances
- Develop and practice an escape plan with household members
- Know what to do if a person's clothing catches on fire; stop, drop, cover and roll.

Get rid of items cluttering your home which no longer have any use: old documents, newspapers, clothing, furniture, appliances and rubbish.

When these items block exits and narrow hallways, they block escape for the occupant and access for fire fighters.

Your Garden

- Cut long grass
- Regularly rake up leaf litter, bark and twigs
- Clear any dead branches and undergrowth within 20 metres of your home
- Prune lower tree branches
- Keep mulch and woodpiles away from walls
- Bin any flammable matter including boxes, cartons, paper and rubbish
- Remove any timber and old junk lying around.



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Fines

Local rangers carry out external household inspections during the bush fire season and they will issue on-the-spot fines to householders. Fines start at \$100 but it can cost you thousands

if you do not comply and the council has to employ a contractor to clean up. The Department will support any action initiated by a local authority against a tenant.

Unless a green waste collection is due in your area soon after you clean up, dispose of the vegetation and any flammable material in your green bin. Many councils prohibit burning of rubbish in an incinerator or on the ground all year round and any person who deliberately lights such a fire may face penalties. Contact your local council for information.

Burning of any type is not permitted on any day where the Fire Danger Rating is Very High, Severe, Extreme or Catastrophic. If you want to use solid fuel BBQs or wood fire pizza ovens between December and March, check with DFES first.

Remember

As a tenant, you are responsible for maintaining the property, including the garden, to a level that meets general street and community standards. It is your obligation to ensure that the property, inside and out, is fire safe. To get ready for the summer months, why not invite your friends, family and neighbours over for a busy bee? Work is always quicker, easier and more fun with more people involved!

Don't gamble with your lives. With a little preparation, it's easy to help prevent your home from going up in flames.

DFES's *Prepare. Act. Survive.* guide is full of great information, tips and checklists. You can find a copy of this guide and further information about fire safety at www.dfes.wa.gov.au.

Best wishes for a safe and happy 2013

A DAY LATE AND A DOLLAR SHORT

Living debt-free would be wonderful, wouldn't it? Nevertheless, everyone from a pauper to a princess owes something to someone at some time. It only becomes a problem when the outgoing exceeds the incoming to such an extent that you start to suffer from stress, and ignoring the problem only makes it worse. Rather than letting the problem spiral out of control, there are some simple things you can do to help manage your money.

1. Paying rent and other debts to the Department of Housing

The Department not only charges you rent but can help you keep it on track. Please contact your Housing Services Officer to receive more information on any of these options:

- If you receive a letter telling you that you are behind in your rent, contact your Housing Services Officer as soon as possible. Housing Services Officers are very experienced with debt management and help people every day by accepting arrangements to pay off the debt. They'll be happy to hear from you because it means that you're willing to sort out the problem.
- The Rent Deduction Scheme is a free service for clients receiving Centrelink payments. Customers use the scheme to pay the Department through automatic deductions. The scheme is convenient and secure and regulating payments in this way removes the burden of having to remember when the payments are due.



- Direct Debiting is when money is automatically transferred from your bank or credit union account to make a payment. It means no more special trips to the Post Office just to make your payments. Payments are always made on time (provided you make sure the account has sufficient funds) and there is no additional cost to you.
- Through the Debt Discount Scheme, current tenants who have an old debt to the Department from a previous tenancy may qualify for assistance to repay it in the form of a discount. Eligible clients only have to pay 50% of the debt they owe. To be eligible to participate in the scheme, the debt must not relate to the current tenancy, a transfer or a Bond Assistance Loan.

2. Using Centrepay

Centrepay is a direct bill-paying service offered to Centrelink customers. Simply allocate an amount of

CALL CHARGES TO 1300 AND 1800 NUMBERS

The cost of making calls to telephone numbers beginning with 1300 or 1800 may be different than what you expect.

The cost depends on two factors:

- the telephone company that provides your landline or mobile service and
- the local/long distance call plan that you have joined.

From Landlines

1300 Numbers: You can make a call from any Australian landline for the cost of a local call. For this reason, these numbers are also known as "local rate" numbers.

1300 numbers have been widely adopted by government and industry. They are designed to maintain equality in access to service across the population.

Long-distance calls made to telephone numbers beginning with 1300 are charged at a low, fixed rate regardless of the length of the call.

1800 Numbers: You can make a call from any Australian

landline for free. This is why these numbers are also known as a "free call" or "toll free" numbers.

1800 telephone numbers provide an important public service. They allow the receiver to pay for incoming calls, as opposed to the standard practice of the caller paying for their outgoing calls. Vital public services have taken up this option as a way of removing a financial barrier to connecting with people.

From Mobiles

Callers using a mobile phone to call either a 1300 or 1800 number will pay a rate that is set by their mobile phone service provider. This is often a timed rate—that is, the same rate as a normal mobile call.

The Department of Housing helps callers to Housing Direct (the Department's call centre) to keep their mobile costs down by offering these options:

1. Callers waiting on hold can key in their telephone number when instructed and have this message save their place in the queue. When the saved call reaches

money to be deducted from your Centrelink payments and these deductions are sent directly to your nominated organisation as full or part payment for services.

Centrelink is free and you can start or stop deductions at any time. There are many types of bills you can pay using this service, such as

- Telephone
- Electricity, gas and water
- Education fees and expenses
- Ambulance
- Child care
- Home care services
- Rental of household goods
- Medical services and equipment.

Contact the business or organisation you want to pay to find out whether it offers Centrelink.

3. HUGS

HUGS (Hardship Utilities Grant Scheme) is a State Government scheme that provides grants to help people with financial difficulties pay their water, gas and electricity bills so their supply is not cut off. You must first contact your utility provider (Synergy, Horizon Power, Alinta, Busselton Water, Water Corporation, Aqwest or WorleyParsons Asset Management) to discuss payment of your bill. If the utility believes you are experiencing financial difficulties, they will ask you to go to see a HUGS registered Financial Counselling Service for an assessment and to submit an application. For more information,

contact the HUGS Unit at the Department for Child Protection on 08 9222 2739.

4. Getting Help

Government funding agreements support financial counsellors throughout Western Australia to provide free and confidential financial counselling services to low-income members of the community experiencing financial hardship. Your privacy is always respected. Call the Financial Counselling Helpline on 1800 007 007 or visit their website at www.financialcounsellors.org.

5. Staying in Control

MoneySmart is an initiative of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. They offer tips and tools to help you make the most of your money. Although it sounds like a terribly serious website it is, in fact, very easy to use, covering a broad range of topics including planning for retirement, having a baby and buying a mobile. There is also information on loans for people with low incomes and a budget planner, calculators and quizzes. Visit www.moneysmart.gov.au.

6. Looking Forward

If you are feeling concerned about your financial situation act NOW: contact the organisation you owe to make an arrangement, use free services, get free advice and get yourself informed. The sooner your money is under control, the sooner your financial stress becomes a thing of the past and the sooner your brighter future can begin.



the front of the queue, Housing Direct phones the caller back.

2. Alternatively, if you are already speaking to Housing Direct and tell them you are concerned about the cost of calling from your mobile, you will be offered the option of an immediate return call.

If you have further queries regarding these phone charges, contact your telephone service provider or The Australian Communications and Media Authority.

CAT STERILISATION

New government regulations passed this year require the compulsory sterilisation and microchipping of cats in WA.

On 1 November 2013 the new legislation will come into effect and will apply to all domestic cats over the age of 6 months. Sterilising cats reduces the number of unwanted kittens, improves cat health and reduces straying and fighting. Non-government organisations in WA offer services to help cat owners meet the new requirements.

The Cat Sterilisation Society offers subsidised fees of as little as \$50 for a male and \$60 for a female, including microchipping. (Conditions apply). Call the Cat Sterilisation Society on 9397 5062 Monday to Wednesday, 9am to 4pm for information and appointments or visit www.catsterilisation.com.au

Please note: The Cat Sterilisation Society is an independent charity staffed by volunteers and is not connected to any government department.



RCD/MCD and Smoke Alarm Testing

The Department of Housing has installed a number of safety devices in your home. These are combined Residual Current Devices/Miniature Circuit Breakers (RCD/MCBs), which provide protection against electrocution and overloading circuits, and smoke alarms.

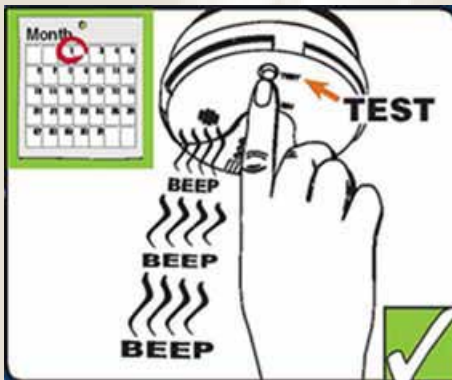
RCD/MCB TESTING

- Press the **TEST** button on the RCD/MCB; you should hear a click.
- The lever will flip downwards in the 'off' position.
- If the RCD/MCB doesn't flip downwards, you need to contact Housing Direct on **1300 137 677**.
- If the lever does flip downwards, then it works.
- Flip the lever upwards to 'on' and this will turn the power on.



SMOKE ALARM TESTING

- To test your smoke alarm turn your power and light circuits off, press the **TEST** button; you should hear the alarm activate.
- The smoke alarm will automatically reset once the button has been released after testing. If you are unable to reach the test button. Please use a broom handle.
- **DO NOT use a screw driver or put tape over the alarm.**
- If you don't hear a sound, contact Housing Direct straight away on **1300 137 677**.
- Once the test is complete, remember to turn your power and light circuits back on.



DO TEST



**DO NOT paint,
remove or cover up**

If you notice a problem with your RCD/MCB or smoke alarm please call **HOUSING DIRECT on 1300 137 677**.

Comments or feedback?

customerfeedback@housing.wa.gov.au or Locked Bag 22, East Perth WA 6892.

