

Home Sweet Hazards

Safety expert Dan Hannan says there are more dangers than people realize lurking in their houses. He offers valuable tips on how to avoid trouble at home.

November 2011 | By Maggie Sieger



How serious a problem are home accidents?

Almost half of accidental deaths occur at home. The top causes are poison, falls, electric shocks, and fires. Home accidents are responsible for more than 3 million injuries, including about 55,000 fatal injuries, nationwide every year. That's more fatalities than from workplace and automobile accidents combined. It's really quite staggering.

In your book, *Preventing Home Accidents—A Quick and Easy Guide* (Hunter House Publishers, 2011), you talk about the “ABCs” of how a home accident occurs. Can you explain?

The ABCs refer to how a person becomes aware of a potential accident. “A” is the activator, the event that starts you on the path to an accident, say, an argument with a family member, a lack of sleep, or talking on your cell phone. “B” is the behavior, the event that occurs because of A, and “C” is the consequence of that behavior, namely the accident.

Can you provide an example?

Say you've had an argument with your spouse, and then you go down into the basement to build a cabinet. When you've had that activator—the argument—you're not mentally on task, so maybe you don't check to see if the saw guard is in place. That behavior, that failure to make proper decisions, results in an accident, one that could be severe or even fatal.

Home Sweet Hazards

What are some hazard recognition techniques?

Before starting a task, everyone should go through a simple hazard analysis. Think about the steps involved in your task and identify potential hazards. If you're going to clean out the gutters, what are the steps? First, you get a ladder and lean it against the house. So what are the steps involved with that? Take a look at the ladder: Make sure all the components are working and that it's in good shape. When you place it against the house, make sure you have proper footings, it's leaning at the proper angle, it's tall enough so that you can safely reach the gutters, and there are no overhead obstructions, particularly power lines. It takes only a couple of minutes to break a task down.

Sounds like common sense. Why don't more people do it?

If you do something dangerous and you don't get hurt, you're going to keep doing it that way—probably until something bad does happen. People don't stop to think of the consequences, such as if their feet aren't properly protected, they could lose their toes. Being safe is a skill that needs to be learned and practiced.

You also say safety can be embarrassing.

(Laughs) You should watch me mow my grass! I wear long pants, steel-toed boots, ear plugs, safety glasses, and leather gloves. My neighbors are in shorts, t-shirts, and tennis shoes—and some have a drink in a cup holder. Being safe usually is more cumbersome and uncomfortable, and, yes, even embarrassing. But at the end of the day, I have all my fingers and toes and both eyes. That's the payoff.

www.becketmorgan.com

