

ARTICLE

Keep Safe at Home: Building Safety Month Tips from Danny Lipford

By Jay Hamburg



Home-improvement expert and safety advocate Danny Lipford offers timely reminders and helpful hints to highlight the four themes for Building Safety Month.



Although structural engineers, seismologists, emergency workers and most builders know the importance of following building codes and safety procedures, some busy homeowners don't take the time to make sure their structures are up to code or that their do-it-yourself home improvement projects meet current standards.

But for everyone – from developers and inspectors, to builders and homeowners, to emergency planners and responders – the month of May is a good time to remember best safety practices and spread the word about making and keeping structures sound and secure.

Building Safety Week – a time-honored tradition observed since 1980 – is expanding to Building Safety Month in May.

The expansion during the 30th annual observance is a testament to the popularity and importance of the

subject as well as to the ever-growing field of building safety. It now includes the use of “green” materials, disaster planning, backyard safety and fire safety. In honor of the first-ever Building Safety Month, nationally known home-improvement expert and safety advocate Danny Lipford offers some timely reminders and helpful hints to help highlight these four safety themes for the month.

While some homeowners and do-it-yourself folks see safety and energy efficiency codes as bothersome, Lipford calls the constantly improving standards an essential part of going green and staying safe.

“Stricter, newer codes have resulted in the saving of structures, lives and the minimizing of insurance claims,” says Lipford, who has offered advice and expertise on several nationally televised programs including *LIVE with Regis & Kelly*, *Rachael Ray*, CNN's *Open House* and CBS's *The Early Show*, as well as appearances on the *Weather Channel*.

Building Safety Month MAY 2010

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Lipford, who has more than 30 years experience as a contractor, also says we need not look any further than the recent earthquake tragedy in Haiti to see how better codes, inspections and standards could have saved an untold number of lives.

In conjunction with the first-ever Building Safety Month, the International Code Council Foundation (ICCF) is offering an updated website with materials to help homeowners and builders who want advice and information. Much of the information coincides with the four themes highlighted during Building Safety Month, sponsored by the ICCF.

The month-long observance will emphasize Energy and Green Building during the week of May 1-8, Disaster Safety and Mitigation during the week of May 9-15, Fire Safety and Awareness from May 16 to May 22, and Backyard Safety from May 23 to May 31.

Complete information on Building Safety Month, including highlights and ways to get involved in the effort, can be found at www.buildingsafetymonth.org. A public relations toolkit with step-by-step instructions and support for a successful Building Safety Month in your area, including promotional posters, safety and prevention brochures, pencils, stickers and children's activities booklets, can all be purchased at [the ICC bookstore](#). You can also download some elements of the toolkit at www.buildingsafetymonth.org.

Lipford, well known to many TV viewers and radio listeners, is also showing his support for Building Safety Month by recording a [public service announcement](#).

Energy and Green Building

One of the easiest ways to have a greener home is to make it more energy efficient. By sealing the leaks that allow heated air to escape in the winter and cool air to seep out in the summer, you are not only saving money on your utility bills but you will be helping the environment.

Using less energy, Lipford says, means preserving more natural resources. "I always suggest that the first place to look for energy leaks and the first place to spend some money is in the attic," Lipford says.

He suggests that homeowners familiarize themselves with the type of insulation they have and then test its average depth by using a ruler or yardstick. The next step is to compare those findings with the standards and requirements for various parts of the country found at consumer-oriented websites such as www.energystar.gov, www.flash.org and www.icc-foundation.org.

Lipford also recommends you make sure you caulk all windows and doors properly. Seal cracks around dryer vents and outdoor faucets.

"Many very simple procedures are still some of the most effective ones," says Lipford, whose website, www.dannylipford.com, offers many self-help videos and handy safety tips.

Lipford says you can make homes greener by using recycled supplies when updating or tackling home improvement projects. Especially noteworthy and widely available are countertops and flooring made from reused materials.

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Disaster Safety and Mitigation

Hurricane Katrina and earthquakes in Haiti and Chile have made everyone painfully aware of the need to plan for disasters; now is the time to make sure homes and buildings are as safe as possible.

One of ICCF's major initiatives is making homes strong enough to protect residents from harm in

major storms and natural disasters, and stable enough to remain sustainable, livable and repairable after the event subsides.

Lipford says that homeowners should know which natural disasters – hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires or earthquakes – are most likely to occur in their region and prepare accordingly.

He notes that Hurricane Andrew showed all of South Florida, not to mention the rest of the world, what a difference roofing straps and proper bracing can make in keeping roofs on homes in a powerful storm. Boarding up windows also can prevent wind and rain damage.

You can lessen damage in tremor- and earthquake-prone areas by adhering to local building codes and making sure water heaters are securely in place, making them less likely to topple over and cause water damage or create gas leaks.

Develop and practice a family emergency plan for meeting in the safest area of the house (often a basement or interior bathroom) and know your evacuation routes in the event of flooding.

Some homeowners may want to consider building a "safe room" for added protection from tornadoes, hurricanes and tremors by fortifying a closet or further strengthening an area of the basement.

And remember that in the event of a major disaster you may need several days of food,

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water and medical supplies on hand in case it takes a while for help to arrive.

Fire Safety and Awareness

Every home needs smoke detectors and a fire extinguisher. Too many people still overlook these simple lifesaving devices.

Lipford and other safety experts recommend at least one smoke detector on each level of the home, preferably on ceilings near bedrooms, as well as in basements and garages. Test smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries annually.

Every home also should have a multipurpose fire extinguisher. Homeowners need to check it periodically and keep it charged.

Families need to have evacuation plans in case of fire. Children should practice fire drills at home just as they do at school.

In addition, don't forget to clear all flammable vegetation at least 30 feet away from all structures to lessen the chance of damage by a wildfire or flames spreading from another home.

Before using a grill, check it out for rust spots or holes where hot materials could fall onto wooden decks or dry grass. When barbecuing, keep the grill away from the side of the house and away from overhanging tree limbs and roof edges.

Watch hamburgers and hot dogs while cooking, and have a fire extinguisher or garden hose nearby.

Backyard Safety

Play it safe in the backyard.

Lipford recommends checking all the swings and slides and other playground sets for sharp edges and rusty points. Make sure they are all in good shape, with bolts and nuts tightened.

Inspect the yard for dead limbs on trees. Not only can they fall on a child, but also a strong wind can turn branches and limbs into dangerous projectiles.

Lipford also recommends checking to see if healthy branches are touching the roof where they will wear down shingles by rubbing against them in the breeze. That can eventually lead to an expensive and messy leak one rainy day or night.

If you have a pool, make sure you have poles, ropes or life preservers nearby to help a struggling swimmer.

Install proper fencing to keep children from wandering into the pool. Pool alarms can alert you when someone is in the water without permission. Alarms on doors and gates that lead to the pool also can warn you of a possible problem.

Be sure that the drain covers in pools and hot tubs meet industry standards. Keeping up with codes and safety procedures may seem burdensome at times for builders and residents.

"Change can be hard," Lipford says. "But in the big picture, it's a small price to pay for safety."

For more information visit www.buildingsafetymonth.org or contact the International Code Council Foundation at (888) 422-7233 ext. 4223.

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Jay Hamburg is a freelance writer in Orlando, Fla. For 29 years, he was a reporter and editor at newspapers that included the *Orlando Sentinel* and *The Tennessean* in Nashville.