



Q: What is the most dangerous place in the world?

A: Bed—Statistics prove that more people die there than anywhere else.

HOWEVER, statistics do prove—and without any catch this time—that the home where we seek security from the hazards of the world is a very dangerous place. Twice as many accidents happen there as at work; twice as many as in public places; only a few less than with motor vehicles. And of the three million-odd injuries sustained at home that passed through U.S.A. hospitals in one year, more than half a million involved a week's absence or more from work; more than a third of a million led to some permanent impairment; more than 32,000 (one in every 100) ended in death. Moreover, these accidental deaths at home were a third of all accidental deaths in the United States; within two per cent of the number killed in motor mishaps; and more than double the number of fatalities at work. Home accidents, in fact, rank eighth among the causes of death—after heart disease, cancer, cerebral hemorrhage, nephritis, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and motor accidents. Maybe Diogenes was right. His tub was at least safer.

How do they happen? First, because the average human being spends an overwhelming proportion of his life-time in his own or someone else's home; and where human beings are there will always be accidents. Second, because so many houses have been built more to be looked at than to be lived in; or more to make money than to meet needs. Third, because later additions to buildings—often connected with the over-loading or patching-up of a "machine-for-living-in" that is too small or too old for its purpose—increase hazards in a way we would not allow outside the home; and fourth, because homes do not come under any Factory Act prescribing penalties for dangerously-placed machinery, or the sack for wives, and prison for householders who persist in slipshod practices.

Where do they happen? Nine out of 10 people will answer at once—"Mostly in the bathroom and the garage." But they are wrong. Though slipping on the soap is the standard household joke and carbon-monoxide poisoning is the average garage-owner's fear, garage and bathroom are the very safest places about the house and section. You slip twice as often on outside steps as in the bathroom. The porch is 13 times as unlucky as the garage. The calculations of American insurance companies and USHA (United States Housing Authority), which gave us the above figures (through the *Architectural Record*), have worked it all out in detail (see diagram).

ARE YOU SAFE AT HOME?

What things are dangerous? The "dangerous machinery" about a house consists of steps (slippery, unnecessary, unexpected, too steep); stairs (badly lit, trip-up fittings, loose runners); polished floors and/or unattached rugs (sliding, straining, falling); curtains near stove, iron, or light bulbs (blown across by wind, they catch fire); retaining walls, veranda posts, and railings (children climb and fall); stoves (if these are placed at awkward levels burns, scalds and fires become likely); poisonous paints (children almost normally chew their cot rails, etc.); electrical appliances (if these are carelessly treated, wear and tear may make short circuits likely, hence shocks or fires).

Electrical gear is not in itself dangerous; but tripping over flex carelessly left lying on floors is a frequent cause of serious accident. Similarly, cupboards save all those barked shins and tempers (and occasionally broken heads) that result from colliding with or falling over articles that would be stored away if only there were somewhere to put them.

What actions are unwise? Leaving things lying about—furniture in unusual places when you go to bed; children's toys around the floor; poisons where children can sample them; razor blades or needles where they can carry them off or you yourself may tread or kneel on them; electrical flex to fall over.

Leaving things sticking out—pot handles on the stove; drawers in tables; windows where heads may hit them; guy ropes on fences and trees.

Leaving things swinging loose—doors where they may suddenly bang on or where you may walk into them edge on in the dark; cupboard doors where you may nip your fingers or bang your head.

Leaving things "on"—gas alight; fire without guard in empty room (especially after kindling with totara or other "sparky" wood); iron plugged in.

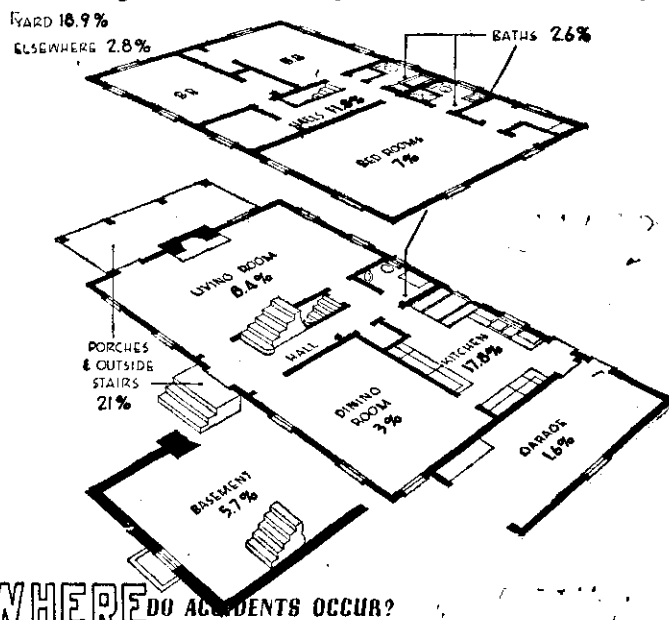
And of course there is sheer carelessness or bad luck—like plugging in the radiator instead of the radio.

How can accidents be avoided? Mostly this seems to rest with the architect. When the housewife arrives on the scene, it is usually already too late. At least so one gathers from the fact that, in houses designed by USHA—the United States equivalent of our State Housing Scheme, which makes safety conditions an aim—accidents have been 61 per cent less than in houses in general. But if ever the day arrives when

you are building for yourself, here are some "don'ts": Don't forget that people who live in glass houses have children who throw stones. Accordingly, when aiming for maximum light, don't place your main window right in front of what is bound to become (unofficially), the cricket pitch. Remember the same thing when levelling the section and building walls and paths, e.g., don't have high, flat-topped walls or veranda rails and posts just crying out to be climbed. Don't have walls at all if sloping banks will do (only in that case plant them with prickly shrubs, remembering also the effect of grass slopes on trouser seats and of trouser seats on grass slopes). Don't have flights of steps without rails or banks.

In short, build a house and prepare a section in which all generations can live together without daily liability to heart failure.

And now some "Do's": Put a light outside your door—there won't always



WHERE DO ACCIDENTS OCCUR?

be the possibility of "black-outs"—remembering that that is where most accidents occur (only do not put it unshaded and at eye level; dazzle is far worse than darkness). Use ramps instead of stairs and steps, both inside and outside the house, if you can manage it. Certainly keep interior changes of level to a minimum, and make your outside paths with chipped concrete—never with bricks that grow green beards in winter. When planning paths alongside the house, remember that most windows to-day open out. Place your light switches where you can reach them without stumbling through furniture, and have those in kitchen and bathroom either pull-cords or of non-conducting material, since touching something electrically alive with one hand and water or metal with the other turns you into a conductor.

Then, when you have done all this, you may be reasonably free to meet those worse hazards of a home—the psychological ones.