

HOME ESCAPE PLANS

People can survive even major fires in their homes if they are alerted to the fire in time and know what to do. In a recent National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) survey, half of the people responding said their family had a fire escape plan, but only 16 percent said they had practiced it.

Survival is Simple

- Install smoke alarms and keep them in working order.
- Make an escape plan and practice it.
- React immediately at the first sign of fire.

Plan Your Escape

There's no time for planning during a fire emergency. Sit down with your family today and make a step-by-step plan for escaping a fire. Draw a floor plan of your home, marking two ways out (including windows) of every room - especially sleeping areas. Discuss the escape routes with every member of your household. Agree on a meeting place outside your home where every member of the household will gather after escaping a fire to wait for the fire department. This allows you to count heads and inform the fire department if anyone is missing or trapped inside the burning building.

IMPORTANT: Practice your escape plan at least twice a year. Have a fire drill in your home. Appoint someone to be monitor and have everyone participate. A fire drill is not a race. Get out quickly, but carefully.

Make your exit drill realistic. Pretend that some exits are blocked by fires and practice using alternative escape routes. Pretend that the lights are out and that some escape routes are filling with smoke.

Be Prepared

Make sure everyone in the household can unlock all doors and windows quickly, even in the dark. Windows or doors with security bars need to be equipped with quick-release devices and everyone in the household should know how to use them.

If you live in an apartment building, use stairways to escape. Never use an elevator during a fire. It may stop between floors or take you to a floor where the fire is burning. Some high-rise buildings may have evacuation plans that require you to stay where you are and wait for the fire department.

If you live in a two-story house and you must escape from a second-story window, be sure there is a safe way to reach the ground. Make special arrangements for children, older adults, and people with



disabilities. People who have difficulty moving should have a phone in their sleeping area and, if possible, should sleep on the ground floor.

Doors need to be tested before opening them. While kneeling or crouching at the door, reach up as high as you can and touch the door, the knob, and the crack between the door and its frame with the back of your hand. If the door is warm, use another escape route. If the door is cool, open it with caution. Put your shoulder against the door and open it slowly. Be prepared to slam it shut if there is smoke or flames on the other side. If you are trapped, close all doors between you and the fire. Stuff the cracks around the doors to keep out smoke. Wait at a window and signal for help with a light-colored cloth or flashlight. Do not break out the window as you may need to close it. If there's a phone in the room, call the fire department and tell them exactly where you are.

Get Out ...

In case of fire, don't stop for anything. Do not try to rescue possessions or pets. Leave the building, go directly to your meeting place, and then call the fire department from a neighbor's phone, a portable phone or an alarm box. Every member of your household should know how to call the fire department. Crawl low under smoke. Smoke contains deadly gases and heat rises. During a fire, cleaner air will be near the floor. If you encounter smoke when using your primary exit, use an alternate escape route. If you must exit through smoke, crawl on your hands and knees, keeping your head 12 to 24 inches (30 to 60 centimeters) above the floor.

...and Stay Out

Once you are out of your home, don't go back for any reason. If people are trapped, the firefighters have the best chance of rescuing them. The heat and smoke of a fire are overpowering. Only firefighters have the training, experience, and protective equipment needed to enter burning buildings.

Play it Safe

More than half of all fatal home fires happen at night while people are asleep. Smoke alarms sound an alarm when they sense smoke from a fire, alerting people before they are trapped or overcome by smoke. With smoke alarms, your risk of dying in a home fire is cut nearly in half. Install smoke alarms outside every sleeping area and on every level of your home, including the basement. Follow installation instructions carefully and test smoke alarms monthly. Change all smoke-alarm batteries at least once a year. If your alarm is more than 10 years old, replace it. For complete home protection, consider installing an automatic fire-sprinkler system.



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