

FIRE PREVENTION TIPS

Installing and testing our smoke alarms

Because fire can grow and spread so quickly, having working smoke alarms in your home can mean the difference between life and death. Once the alarm sounds, you may have as few as two minutes to escape. Smoke alarms are the most effective early warning devices available. Just having a smoke alarm in your home cuts your chance of dying in a fire nearly in half.

You can reduce your risk even more by learning how to effectively use the smoke alarm's early warning to get out safely.

Home Safety Council

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement. Make sure there is an alarm in or near every sleeping area.
- Mount the smoke alarms high on walls or ceilings—remember, smoke rises. Ceiling-mounted alarms should be installed at least four inches away from the nearest wall; wall-mounted alarms should be installed four to 12 inches away from the ceiling.
- If you have ceilings that are pitched, install the alarm near the ceiling's highest point.
- Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors, or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.
- Hard-wired smoke alarms operate on your household electrical current. They can be interconnected so that every alarm sounds regardless of the fire's location. This is an advantage in early warning, because it gives occupants extra time to escape if they are in one part of the home and a fire breaks out in another part. Alarms that are hard-wired should have battery backups in case of a power outage, and should be installed by a qualified electrician.
- Don't paint your smoke alarms; paint, stickers or other decorations could keep them from working properly.

a great idea...

Install all new smoke alarms and batteries when you move into a new home, unless the seller/renter can certify that they are new. Test your smoke alarms when you return from an extended trip to make sure your batteries haven't gone dead while you were away.

Keep your smoke alarms working properly



- Test your smoke alarms at least once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Replace the batteries in your smoke alarm once a year, or as soon as the alarm "chirps," warning that the battery is low.
HINT: Schedule battery replacements for the same day you change your clock from daylight to standard time in the fall and from standard time to daylight in the spring.
- Never "borrow" a battery from a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms can't warn you of fire if their batteries are missing or have been disconnected.

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- Don't disable smoke alarms even temporarily. You may forget to replace the battery. If your smoke alarm is sounding "nuisance alarms," it may need dusting or vacuuming. If that doesn't work, try relocating it further away, but not too far, from kitchens and bathrooms, where cooking fumes and steam can cause the alarm to sound.
- Regularly vacuuming or dusting your smoke alarms following manufacturer's instructions can help keep it working properly.
- Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace your smoke alarms once every 10 years according to the *Home Safety Council*.
- Make sure that everyone in your home can identify and awaken to the sound of the alarm.
- According to the *Home Safety Council*, plan regular fire drills - twice a year is best - to ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do when the smoke alarm sounds. Hold a drill at night to make sure that sleeping family members awaken at the sound of the alarm.
- If you are building a new home or remodeling your existing home, consider installing an automatic home sprinkler system. According to the *National Safety Council*, sprinklers and smoke alarms together cut your risk of dying in a home fire 82 percent relative to having neither – a savings of thousands of lives a year.

NOTE: The *Home Safety Council* recommends that you mount the smoke alarms high on ceilings or walls – remember, smoke rises. Ceiling-mounted alarms should be installed at least four inches away from the nearest wall; wall-mounted alarms should be installed four to 12 inches away from the ceiling. On vaulted ceilings, be sure to mount the alarm at the highest point of the ceiling.

**Home fire
escape plans
Plan Grid.doc
Appendix A**

- Pull together everyone in your household and make a plan. Walk through your home and inspect all possible exits and escape routes. Households with children should consider drawing a floor plan of your home, marking two ways out of each room, including windows and doors. Also, mark the location of each smoke alarm.
- Make sure that you have at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home.
- Everyone in the household must understand the escape plan. When you walk through your plan, check to make sure the escape routes are clear and doors and windows can be opened easily.
- Choose an outside meeting place (i.e. neighbor's house, a light post, mailbox, or stop sign) a safe distance in front of your home where everyone can meet after they've escaped. Make sure to mark the location of the meeting place on your escape plan.
- Go outside to see if your street number is clearly visible from the road. If not, paint it on the curb or install house numbers to ensure that responding emergency personnel can find your home.

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- Have everyone memorize the emergency phone number of the fire department so that any member of the household can call from a neighbor's home or a cellular phone once safely outside.
- If there are infants, older adults or family members with mobility limitations make sure that someone is assigned to assist them in the fire drill and in the event of an emergency. Assign a backup person too, in case the designee is not home during the emergency.
- If windows or doors in your home have security bars, make sure that the bars have quick-release mechanisms inside so that they can be opened immediately in an emergency. Quick-release mechanisms won't compromise your security, but they will increase your chances of safely escaping a home fire.
- Tell guests or visitors to your home about your family's fire escape plan. When staying overnight at other people's homes, ask about their escape plan. If they don't have a plan in place, offer to help them make one. This is especially important when children are permitted to attend "sleepovers" at friend's homes. Be fully prepared for a real fire; when a smoke alarm sounds, get out immediately. Residents of high-rise and apartment buildings may be safer "defending in place".¹
- Once you're out, stay out! Under no circumstances should you ever go back into a burning building. If someone is missing, inform the fire department dispatcher when you call. Firefighters have the skills and equipment to perform rescues.

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¹ According to the National Safety Council:

Never use the elevator - In case of fire, always use the stairs to get out, never the elevator. Make sure to practice using the stairs as part of your escape plan. If someone in your family has difficulty climbing down steps, make sure to incorporate a contingency for this into your plan.

Seal yourself in for safety

If you can't exit an apartment building due to smoke or fire in the hallway, call the fire department to report your exact location and gather in a room with a window to await their arrival. Close all doors between you and the fire. Use duct tape or towels to create a seal around the door and over air vents in order to keep smoke from coming in.

Stay by the window

If possible, you should open your windows at the top and the bottom so fresh air can get in. Don't break the window - if smoke enters the room from outside the building, you won't be able to protect yourself.

Signal to firefighters

Wave a flashlight or light colored cloth at the window to let the fire department know where you are located.

Putting your plan to the test

- Practice your home fire escape plan twice a year, making the drill as realistic as possible.
- Allow children to master fire escape planning and practice before holding a fire drill at night when they are sleeping. The objective is to practice, not to frighten, so telling children there will be a drill before they go to bed can be as effective as a surprise drill.
- It's important to determine during the drill whether children and others can readily waken to the sound of the smoke alarm. If they fail to awaken, make sure that someone is assigned to wake them up as part of the drill and in a real emergency situation.
- If your home has two floors, every family member (including children) must be able to escape from the second floor rooms. Escape ladders can be placed in or near windows to provide an additional escape route. Review the manufacturer's instructions carefully so you'll be able to use a safety ladder in an emergency.
- Practice setting up the ladder from a first floor window to make sure you can do it correctly and quickly. Children should only practice with a grown-up, and only from a first-story window. Store the ladder near the window, in an easily accessible location. You don't want to have to search for it during a fire.
- Always choose the escape route that is safest – the one with the least amount of smoke and heat – but be prepared to escape through toxic smoke if necessary. When you do your fire drill, everyone in the family should practice crawling low on their hands and knees, one to two feet above the ground. By keeping your head low, you'll be able to breathe the "good" air that's closer to the floor. It's important to practice crawling on your hands and knees, not your bellies, as some poisons produced by smoke are heavier than air and settle to the floor.
- Closing doors on your way out slows the spread of fire, giving you more time to safely escape.
- In some cases, smoke or fire may prevent you from exiting your home or apartment building. To prepare for an emergency like this, practice "sealing yourself in for safety" as part of your home fire escape plan.

Escape planning for older adults

Knowing what to do in the event of a fire is particularly important for older adults. According to the *National Safety Council*, at age 65, people are twice as likely to be killed or injured by fires compared to the population at large. And with our numbers growing every year - in the United States and Canada, adults age 65 and older make up about 12 percent of the population - it's essential to take the necessary steps to stay safe.

Keep it low

If you don't live in an apartment building, consider sleeping in a room on the ground floor in order to make emergency escape easier. Make sure that smoke alarms are installed near any sleeping area, and have a telephone installed where you sleep in case of emergency.

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**Escape
planning for
older adults****Sound the alarm**

The *Home Safety Council* indicates that the majority of fatal fires occur when people are sleeping, and because smoke can put you into a deeper sleep rather than waking you, it's important to have a mechanical early warning of a fire to ensure that you wake up. If anyone in your household is deaf or if your own hearing is diminished, consider installing a smoke alarm that uses a flashing light, vibration and/or higher decibel sound to alert you to a fire emergency.

Do the drill

Conduct your own, or participate in, regular fire drills to make sure you know what to do in the event of a home fire. If you or someone you live with cannot escape alone, designate a member of the household to assist, and decide on backups in case the designee isn't home. Fire drills are also a good opportunity to make sure that everyone is able to hear and respond to smoke alarms.

Open up

Make sure that you are able to open all doors and windows in your home. Locks and pins should open easily from inside. (Some apartments and high-rise buildings have windows designed not to open.) If you have security bars on doors or windows, they should have quick-release mechanisms inside so that they can be opened easily. These mechanisms won't compromise your safety, but they will enable you to open the window from inside in the event of a fire. Check to be sure that windows haven't been sealed shut with paint or nailed shut; if they have, arrange for someone to break the seals all around your home or remove the nails.

Stay connected

Keep a telephone nearby, along with emergency phone numbers so that you can communicate with emergency personnel if you're trapped in your room by fire or smoke.

In conclusion

Today, more than ever, Americans are acutely aware of how fundamental our safety and securities are to our quality of life. Keeping our families safe at home is a top priority for most of us. Yet each year, according to the *National Safety Council*, thousands of Americans die and millions are injured in preventable incidents in and around the home. Fires and burns are among the leading causes of preventable home injuries and deaths.

Be proactive and secure the health and safety of you and your family by following some of the tips delineated in this document. And remember to...

When Fire Strikes: GET OUT! STAY OUT!
