

Prepare Your Family for Fire Safety

Escape Plan

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Smoke alarms provide a critical early warning of fire, but getting your family out of the home quickly is just as critical. And that takes planning.

Making an escape plan and practicing it regularly greatly increases the chance that everyone in your family will act quickly and correctly in the event of a fire.



MAKE A PLAN

Know Your Roles

Good escape plans vary from family to family. **Every family must think carefully about what each member can do in an emergency, taking into account different ages and capabilities.** Most preschool and elementary school children will not awaken to the sound of a smoke alarm. They will hear it, but they have an amazing capacity to block out even the loudest noises. They may, however, awaken easily to the sound of a parent's voice.

Some family members may wake up, but have physical limitations and need assistance to escape (they may also need to sleep in a room on the ground floor to make escape easier). Still others may have hearing loss. You do not need a complete loss of hearing to be unable to hear the particular sound a smoke alarm makes.

Plan Multiple Exit Routes

It's important to think about how you'll exit from a variety of locations in the house, including every bedroom. If you have an early warning and the main exit routes are clear of fire and smoke, then those would be the fastest way out. But you cannot always count on that.

It's difficult to predict where a fire might start. So if your main exit route is blocked, it's critical that you have planned an alternative.

Protect in Place

One of these alternatives could be protecting yourself in place. If the room you are in is free of smoke and fire, close the door, cover the opening at the base of the door and go to the window to call attention to yourself. In most city and suburban fire districts, the fire department's response time is short enough to help you escape if you must stay in place. If you live in a rural area, or are uncertain about your fire department's response time, call your local fire department and ask.

Designate a Meeting Place

A key element of a good escape plan is to designate a place to meet when everyone is out of the house. Not knowing whether everyone has made it out safely creates enormous anxiety and puts firefighters at unnecessary risk searching for someone in a burning house who is actually outside. Everyone should be taught the critical importance of going to the meeting place and staying there.

Once you are out, do not go back inside for anything. If you open a door or window to go back inside, you let in oxygen. That's all the fire needs to engulf a room. Stay outside at your meeting place, where you can do the most good by communicating with firefighters. It takes just a few seconds to tell them if everyone is outside and at your meeting place, and about any pets or valuables that may still be inside.

Calling 911

Make sure everyone in your household who is old enough to use a phone knows how to call 911 and is prepared to answer the questions the emergency dispatcher will ask. To get help fast, you will be asked your name, address, phone number, nearest corner to your house, and the reason for your call. Remind everyone to stay calm and not hang up until the dispatcher gives permission. If for any reason questions cannot be answered, keep the phone line open and help will come.

PRACTICE THE PLAN

Having a thoughtful plan is a critical first step. Trying it out is equally important. Just walking through your main and alternative exit routes is a valuable reality check. You may plan to exit a window without realizing it is painted shut, or very difficult to open, or too small for everyone to climb through.

Practicing the plan a few times, rather than simply relying on everyone remembering and reciting their responsibilities, makes it much more likely you'll move quickly and correctly in a real fire. Remembering the details of a plan you have never actually used, especially when awakened in the middle of the night, is very difficult. Having done it a few times makes it much easier to recall.

This is especially true of children. Take a look at this video from homefiredrill.org. It shows that even children who are able to clearly and accurately describe their plan cannot be counted on to follow it when awakened if they haven't practiced.

Review the Plan

Every family needs to review their plan periodically, especially if there are changes in the household. A new baby, an elderly relative moving in, changes to the layout of your home, an injury, or simply the normal aging of household members may call for changes to the way you exit.

Escape Plan Checklist

- Develop an escape plan for your home that takes into account the capabilities of everyone there. Make sure the plan clearly describes what everyone is to do if the alarm sounds.
- Identify at least two routes out of every room, or anywhere someone might be sleeping.
- Identify a meeting place.
- Take turns pretending to call 911 as practice.
- Try out your plan to make sure it is feasible.

- Periodically practice your plan. Practice will make it much more likely that everyone will remember their responsibilities and be able to act quickly, especially if awakened during the night.
- Update your plan when there are changes in your home or family.

Learn More

An engaging, interactive game demonstrating the decisions people need to make when escaping a fire is available at **Help Mikey Make it Out:** <http://www.homefiredrill.org/?p=help-mikey-make-it-out>

More information about good escape planning is available at:

<http://www.homefiredrill.org>

<http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/escape-planning>