

Home fire escape planning and practice can make a critical difference for your entire family. By developing and practicing a home fire escape plan, your family will know exactly what to do in a fire so everyone can escape quickly and safely.

Canadian Statistics: Between 1997 and 1998, 29 children ages 14 and under died from fire and burn-related injuries and an additional 1,059 were hospitalized.

Every household must have a fire escape plan and a working smoke alarm to help ensure survival in a fire. Begin your plan by checking your smoke alarm to make sure that it is working. The smoke alarm will wake you up if a fire occurs while you are asleep.

#### Develop a Home Fire Escape Plan

Because the majority of fatal fires happen at night, it is essential to have working alarms throughout your home to awaken or alert you in case of fire. Some studies have shown that some children may not awaken to the sound of the smoke alarm. Know what your child will do before a fire occurs.

Smoke alarms need to be installed on each level of the home, including the basement, and outside each separate sleeping area. If you sleep with bedroom doors closed, have a qualified electrician install interconnected smoke alarms in each room so that when one sounds, they all sound. New homes are required to have a smoke alarm in every sleeping room and all smoke alarms must be interconnected.

Test the alarms every month, following the manufacturer's instructions, and replace the batteries once a year or when the alarm "chirps," warning that the battery is low.

Draw a floor plan of your home. Make an outline of your entire floor area: dimensions and details need not be exact. Now add each bedroom and label it. Locate windows, doors and stairways. If any upper floor, shade in any rooftops that could be used as a fire escape.

You'll need two ways out of every room. One way out would be the door, and the second way out may be a window. Most home fires start between the hours of midnight and 6:00 a.m., just when you are asleep - and least prepared! Most home fires start in this order: kitchen, living room, basement, bedrooms, all others. This means that most fires start just where they are likely to block your usual escape (from bedrooms). Consider purchasing a home fire escape ladder for bedrooms located on second and third floors - review the manufacturer's instructions carefully to be able to use a safety ladder for an emergency escape from a window. Practice setting up the ladder from a first floor window to make sure you can do it correctly and quickly.

Include any important features that could help with your escape. Doors and windows are escape exits from your home. Are there any other features that could help you get out safely? Can you climb out a window onto the roof of a porch or garage? Is there a tree or television antenna tower that can be safely reached from a window? These features can be extremely useful in an emergency, however you must make sure that all escape routes are practical and usable.

Go to each bedroom and select the best window for an emergency escape. Test the windows or screens to see that they work easily and are large and low enough to use.

Sleeping with a bedroom or hall door closed can keep out fire long enough to allow escape through your emergency escape route (usually a window.). Make certain that a smoke alarm is installed and operating properly in the hallway outside bedrooms. Fire safety officials are now recommending the placement of smoke alarms inside bedrooms where the door is kept closed at night. This is to protect against the advent of fire starting inside the bedroom.

Remember - some people may need help to escape. Decide in advance who will assist the very young, elderly or physically challenged members of your household. A few minutes of planning will save valuable seconds in a real emergency.

Choose an outside meeting place with your family. Make sure it's a safe distance from your home and mark it on the escape plan. Practice having all members of your household report immediately to your outside meeting place during fire drills.

Everyone should memorize the local fire department's emergency phone number, which should be contacted from a neighbor's phone, or by using a nearby portable or cell phone you bring with you as you exit your home.

Gather your family together for a short explanation of the vital nighttime fire escape procedures. After you make your plan, practice it! Fire escape plans should be practiced at least twice a year. Pick a date with your family to practice -- make sure that everyone is involved - from kids to grandparents. If there are infants or family members with mobility limitations, make sure that someone is assigned to assist them. Be fully prepared for a real fire: when a smoke alarm sounds, get out immediately. And once you're out, stay out!

#### Practice Makes Perfect.... Conducting Your Fire Escape Drill

##### First Drill:

Escape through normal exit (hall or stairway).

##### Second Drill:

Imagine doors are hot and the hall is blocked by fire. Now everyone must test his emergency escape exit. Depending on age and capability, you need not actually go out on the roof, but be sure everyone can open windows, screens easily, and position emergency escape ladder quickly, etc.

Don't waste time getting dressed or gathering valuables. Precious seconds can count in a fire.

Test the door before opening. Intense heat and deadly smoke can be on the other side.

Have an outside meeting place to quickly check if everyone is safe. Once out - STAY OUT!

Plan to use a neighbour's phone to dial 911 (or your local emergency number).

#### Apartment Living

If you live in an apartment building, make sure that you're familiar with the building's evacuation plan. In case of a fire, use the stairs, never the elevator. In some cases, the safest action when a fire alarm sounds may be to stay inside your apartment and protect yourself from smoke until the fire department arrives. Seal all doors and vents with duct tape or towels to prevent smoke from entering the room. Open a window at the top and bottom so fresh air can enter. Be ready to close the window immediately if it draws smoke into the room. Call the fire department and let them know that you are still inside the building. Wave a flashlight or light colored cloth at the window to let the fire department know where you are located.

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