

FAMILY FIRE SAFETY PLAN

Fires can occur day or night. In the daytime they may appear to be deceptively small and easily controllable. At night, fire becomes a swift terror, worse than any nightmare.

Fires remain small and grow slowly for only a short time. After that, a fire can become a rolling inferno, moving through your home in moments. During the first five minutes, a small fire can preheat the ceiling materials of a room to over a thousand degrees. At this temperature, materials commonly found in a home begin to break down and release vapors. Some vapors coming from these materials at this point in the fire are as flammable as gasoline vapors. When the room becomes rich enough with vapors, the fire will move across the room in one rapid sweep. It only takes a couple of seconds under these conditions for the fire to change from the small, beginning stage to a fully involved room. This is called “flashover”. In a 10 by 10-foot room, it may happen in as little as two minutes. People can become trapped because they don’t realize how fast the situation can change.

Once a fire flashes over in a room, it will begin to spread rapidly throughout the building. The number and location of open doors will directly affect the speed and direction the fire will take. Heated gases created by the fire will be forced from the room rapidly because they are expanding. In fire tests these gases have been seen to carry the fire down the hall at a rate of a hundred feet in ten seconds. This deadly speed is only possible when doors are nonexistent or are open. Closing any door in the path of the fire slows its spread for a time. How much time depends on the material and the construction of the door. Ordinary room doors will confine a fire for three to five minutes. Sometimes that confinement can last longer.

Take time to create an Evacuation Plan. Include escape routes and a meeting place outside the house. Don’t forget special considerations may be necessary for those with special needs such as children and seniors.

Create a “Go-Kit” of things you will want to take with you if you must suddenly evacuate. Include legal documents, a list of valuables, jewelry, computer files and keepsakes.

UPON DISCOVERY OF AN INTERIOR FIRE

GET OUT! Fire Safety in the home means, with few exceptions, complete evacuation of the home.

Close the doors. Do not fight the fire unless it is to save a life. By closing the door, you confine the fire and slow its spread. With the door closed the fire may be confined to a single room. If possible, close the doors to other rooms on your way out to give added protection.

Notify! Once you are outside, call the Fire Department. Dial 911 from a neighbor's phone and be prepared to provide the address, nearest cross street and a call back phone number. (The phone you are calling from). Don't hang up before the dispatcher tells you they have all your information. Be prepared to tell the person on the other end of the phone line, who you are, where you are, and what the problem is. If you are in an apartment house with an alarm system, pull the alarm in order to alert the other tenants. You can dial 911 from a pay phone without putting any money in the phone. Public pay phones may not have a call back number.

REPORT ALL FIRES AND SMOKE

Many times people are hesitant to call the Fire Department for small fires. There are a number of reasons for this. Some people feel themselves capable of handling the situation. Others are embarrassed that they had a fire, and don't want anyone to know. Some fear being charged for the service that the Fire Department provides. Consider the risks. Three reasons for making the call are:

- You are required by law to report fires.
- It is often necessary to have a fire report on hand from the Fire Department before an insurance company will pay compensation.
- Fires should be reported even when you think they have been put out so that they may be inspected by the Fire Department to insure that they have been completely extinguished.

FAMILY FIRE SAFETY PLAN

A set of procedures for your home is a good thing to have when dealing with an emergency. As a family, discuss various emergencies and develop plans for how the family members are to deal with them. Survival rates increase in homes with emergency plans. A home evacuation plan should contain at least the following;

- Procedures for actions taken during an emergency
- An evacuation plan showing alternate escape routes
- An assembly point.

1. Draw a floor plan of your home. Include the following:

- a. A primary and secondary exit route from each room. The primary route should be directly to the outside such as through a window.
- b. The location of any fire equipment
- c. Mark the area where everyone is to meet once they are outside of the house.
- d. Mark the location of utility shut-off switches and valves.

2. Physically check the exit routes to be sure that anyone, who will need to use them, can use them. This will clarify the need for things like escape ladders, ramps, security grill release mechanisms for protected doors and windows, and the availability of keys for double key locks.

3. Go over the plan with the entire family.

- a. Make sure that everyone understands that they are not to go back into the house once they are out. Go to the meeting area and wait.
- b. Discuss how to feel the door if it is closed and not to open it if it is hot.
- c. Talk about the danger of smoke and heat and the importance of staying low.
- d. Discuss what to do in the event that they become trapped.
- e. Be sure that everyone knows what the smoke detector sounds like.

The first thing to consider when formulating a plan is to have some method of being made aware of the danger. Smoke detectors are simple, automatic devices to provide that notification. You may also consider providing each bedroom with a whistle of some sort as a manual method of notifying the family to get out.

Sleeping with the doors closed provides barriers between those you love and night time fire in your home. The average household door will last approximately three to five minutes with a fully involved room. Closed doors have saved many lives by giving people the time to escape. Sometimes, people with small children or infants think that leaving the door open at night will enable them to hear in case their children cry or call out. In a fire, the open door may allow toxic gases to enter the rooms and render both the parents and the children unconscious before any of them are aware of the problem. Inexpensive devices not only allow monitoring other rooms, but in some cases, communicating with them.

At the sound of the alarm or if you suspect that there is a fire in your home, get out! If you reach a closed door, feel it before opening. If it is hot, don't open it. ***Try to use a direct exit to the outside.*** If the door is cool to the touch, open it cautiously, keeping the door between you and the opening. Stay low and be prepared to close it quickly if heat or smoke is present. In the event that you must move through smoke, stay low, on hands and knees crawling quickly to the nearest exit. If you must break a window because it won't open, you can use a heavy object. Use it to punch out all of the glass starting from the top. Scrape the bottom edge of the window to remove fragments that may be sticking up and could injure you. Placing a blanket, pillow or article of clothing on the sill before you climb out provides additional protection.

Evacuation from a two-story home can be a little more difficult. Consider is the purchase of an escape ladder. They are all designed to attach quickly to a window sill (available for three-story buildings). It is important that every member of the family practice with the ladder. In a two-story building, you must go out the window without a ladder, lower yourself out of the window feet first, facing the building. Hang down from the windowsill at arm's length, let go, and drop to the ground. In this position in your average residence, an adult's feet are within six or seven feet off the ground.

IF YOU ARE TRAPPED IN A ROOM

There may be a situation where there is no way to get out. It may be necessary to sit tight and wait for the Fire Department to put the fire out. Close as many doors between you and the fire as possible. Stuff the cracks of the door, and any vents that are allowing smoke into the room. If available, add additional materials such as a mattress or a table over the door and prop them in place with other pieces of furniture. Make your location known. If there is a phone available and it works, call for help. If there is no phone, or it doesn't work, yell, hang a sheet out a window to get someone's attention. If you need to open a window do so, but avoid breaking the window if possible. The need may arise to close the window if smoke from outside is coming in.

SMOKE DETECTORS

Tests have shown that smoke detectors of either the ionization or photoelectric type should provide adequate warning to the occupants for most residential fires. Ionization detectors respond slightly faster to open, flaming fires than the photoelectric type, but the photoelectric detectors respond faster to smoldering fires with little or no visible flame. Detectors should be located on the ceiling at least 12" from the wall, or on the wall 12" from the ceiling to the top of the detector. Detectors are required in each sleeping room and the areas giving access to them. If you have battery operated smoke detectors you must maintain them, and make sure that the batteries are replaced regularly. Do not remove the batteries because of nuisance alarms such as steam from showers etc. These problems should be dealt with in another manner such as moving the detector or simply closing doors. Studies have shown that in residential fires causing death, 60% of those residences did not have smoke detectors, had disconnected the smoke detectors, or had dead or missing batteries. Consider changing the batteries every six months. This would also be a good time to vacuum the detector and remove as much dust as possible. This will help to insure that it will work properly when you need it. If you have hardwired detectors, consider purchasing a couple of battery type and mounting them in strategic places as a back-up system. Some special considerations for the elderly or the handicapped may need to be addressed in your home. In general, households with elderly or handicapped occupants need a higher level of protection in order to provide additional escape time. As an example, a supervised alarm system where the alarm is monitored by an alarm company that would call the Fire Department, or in the case of someone with a hearing loss, detectors that activate lights, bed shakers or fans.

What to do Before a Wildfire

If you see a wildfire, call 9-1-1. Don't assume that someone else has already called. Describe the location of the fire, speak slowly and clearly, and answer any questions asked by the dispatcher.

Before the Fire Approaches Your House

- **Evacuate.** Evacuate your pets and all family members who are not essential to preparing the home. Anyone with medical or physical limitations and the young and the elderly should be evacuated immediately.
- **Wear Protective Clothing.**
- **Remove Combustibles.** Clear items that will burn from around the house, including wood piles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, tarp coverings, etc. Move them outside of your defensible space.
- **Close/Protect Openings.** Close outside attic, eaves and basement vents, windows, doors, pet doors, etc. Remove flammable drapes and curtains. Close all shutters, blinds or heavy non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat.
- **Close Inside Doors/Open Fireplace Damper.** Close all doors inside the house to prevent draft. Open the damper on your fireplace, but close the fireplace screen.
- **Shut Off Gas.** Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- **Water.** Connect garden hoses. Fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water.
- **Pumps.** If you have gas-powered pumps for water, make sure they are fueled and ready.
- **Ladder.** Place a ladder against the house in clear view.
- **Car.** Back your car into the driveway and roll up the windows.
- **Garage Doors.** Disconnect any automatic garage door openers so that doors can still be opened by hand if the power goes out. Close all garage doors.
- **Valuables.** Place valuable papers, mementos and anything "you can't live without" inside the car in the garage, ready for quick departure. Any pets still with you should also be put in the car.

Preparing to Leave

- **Lights.** Turn on outside lights and leave a light on in every room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.
- **Don't Lock Up.** Leave doors and windows closed but unlocked. It may be necessary for firefighters to gain quick entry into your home to fight fire. The entire area will be isolated and patrolled by sheriff's deputies or police.

What to do During a Wildfire

Survival in a Vehicle

- This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency, but you can survive the firestorm if you stay in your car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.
- Roll up windows and close air vents. Drive slowly with head lights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not drive through heavy smoke.
- If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn head lights on and ignition off. Roll up windows and close air vents.
- Get on the floor and cover up with a blanket or coat.
- Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes.

Stay in the car. Do not run! Engine may stall and not restart. Air currents may rock the car. Some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle. Temperature inside will increase. Metal gas tanks and containers rarely explode.

If You Are Trapped at Home

Stay calm. As the fire front approaches, go inside the house. You can survive inside. The fire will pass before your house burns down.

If you are unable to evacuate when a fire approaches:

- Stay inside your house away from outside walls.
- Keep all doors closed but leave them unlocked.
- Keep your entire family together and REMAIN CALM: Remember if it gets hot inside the house, it is 4 to 5 times hotter and more dangerous outside.
- After the fire passes: Check the exterior and roof immediately. Extinguish any burning embers. Also check inside the attic for hidden burning embers.

If Caught in the Open

- The best temporary shelter is in a sparse fuel area. On a steep mountainside, the back side is safer. Avoid canyons, natural "chimneys" and saddles.
- If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire's heat.
- If hiking in the back country, seek a depression with sparse fuel. Clear fuel away from the area while the fire is approaching and then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself. Stay down until after the fire passes!

What to do After a Wildfire

- Check the roof immediately. Put out any roof fires, sparks or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.
- If you have a fire, get your neighbors to help fight it.
- The water you put into your pool or hot tub and other containers will come in handy now. If the power is out, try connecting a hose to the outlet on your water heater.
- For several hours after the fire, maintain a "fire watch." Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.

Remember: Chances of having a second fire within the first few years after an area burns are high due to the grasses and plants that follow the first burn.