

**PROTECT
YOUR FAMILY
FROM FIRE**



FIRE DRILLS:

The Great Escape

When the unthinkable happens and a fire breaks out in your home, every second counts. A fire spreads most quickly right after it starts: It can double in size in 30 seconds and fill the entire house with toxic smoke within two minutes. So when the alarm sounds, you and your family have only a few seconds to get out. That is why it is essential to develop a fire-escape plan for your family, and practice it regularly. Taking a few minutes now to formulate and practice your fire-escape plan can mean a lifetime later on.

Why Have a Fire-Escape Plan?

The United States Fire Administration estimates that approximately 3,400 Americans die of fire-related causes each year. That is over nine people per day, giving the United States one of the highest fire death rates in the industrialized world. Most fire-related deaths occur in residences, so individuals are key to reducing this tragic figure. Following a few simple steps can help you and your family avoid serious injury and death from fire.

step one: **1** Prepare.



► **INSTALL SMOKE DETECTORS.** Your home should have smoke detectors on each floor; having one in each bedroom and in main hallways is a good idea. Test the detectors every week, and replace the batteries at least twice a year. Do not disable your smoke detector for any reason; use a cover or fan to keep smoke from the kitchen from setting it off. (People often disable their detectors and then forget to reactivate them.) Smoke detectors powered by household electric current are an option, but make sure they have a backup power supply in case of an interruption of electric service.

► **GET ORGANIZED.** Remove unnecessary clutter from your home, especially flammable materials like old newspapers and magazines, rags used for dusting or with oil on them, and unused items made of plastic or synthetic fabrics. Make sure walkways, stairways, and doors and windows are unobstructed.

Doors and windows should help your escape, not hinder it. Keys to doors that are usually locked should be kept in the doors or in an easily reached place nearby. All windows should unlock and open easily, and each room should have at least one window exit. Avoid burglar bars that cannot be released from the inside.



► INVEST IN ESCAPE LADDERS.

Have collapsible escape ladders available for escape from windows on the second floor and higher, and be sure that you practice setting up the ladder.

step two:

2

Make a plan.

► HAVE A FAMILY MEETING.

Bring your family together to create a fire-escape plan. Set guidelines and make sure everyone understands what to do in case of fire: Extinguish it if possible, alert sleeping or showering family members, exit the house quickly in an orderly manner, assist those who need help, call **911** from a neighbor's house, etc.



Consider the needs of children, mature adults and disabled individuals in your home when making your plan: Make sure that children know what to do in case of fire and no adults are around, and assign an adult to help each older and disabled person get out of the house safely. Your plan should also take pets into consideration and provide for their safety. Take steps to protect important papers and other valuable possessions as well.

► DRAW A MAP.

Make a large floor-plan drawing of your home, using a different sheet of paper for each level, and with a blue or black marker show the location of doors, windows, stairways and large pieces of furniture. Be sure to include important points outside the home: garage, patio, outdoor fire-escape stairways, driveways and porches. Also indicate the location of fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, collapsible ladders, first-aid kits and utility shut-off points. Use a pen of a different color (**red or orange**) to draw a dashed line charting at least two escape routes from each room. Finally, indicate in a different color (**green or brown**) a safe place outside the home for everyone to meet.



► **POST THE PLAN.** Put the map, along with a list of key instructions, on the wall of a room that everyone in the house spends a fair amount of time in, like the kitchen or den.



step three: 3

Practice Your Escape

► **HOLD REGULAR DRILLS.**



As a family, agree on a signal that can be heard throughout the house that will serve as the start of a fire drill. The signal can be either a smoke alarm test, a whistle or a loud bell. Hold at least two drills per year, both during the day and at night. (Nighttime drills are valuable because the darkness simulates the conditions your family will have to deal with in an actual fire.) Hold surprise drills when everyone is at home, and time the drill using a stopwatch. Include variations in the drill to simulate possible problems they might encounter while trying to escape a burning house, such as a major exit being blocked by fire and smoke. Try to improve your time with each subsequent drill.



► **PRACTICE FIRE-ESCAPE ACTIVITIES.**

Practice gives you and your family a better sense of what you will need to do physically in case of an actual fire.

- **Roll out of bed and crawl along the floor to the exit.** It is important to keep your head as low as possible—in a fire, the only breathable air is one to two feet above the floor.



- **Check closed doors' temperature.** Use

the back of your hand to check the surface of the door, the doorknob, around the crack of the door and under the door for heat. In an actual emergency, if any part of the door is hot, or if smoke is coming in under the door, do not open it; crawl to the room's other exit.



- **Close all doors behind you to slow the spread of smoke and flames.**

- **If your home is equipped with an elevator, do not use it under any circumstances, even in practice drills.**

- **Practice escaping through first-floor windows, and setting up portable escape ladders from inside second-floor windows.** To exit a window, slide out of the window, feet first, on your stomach. Lower yourself out of the window, holding on to the sill with your hands. Drop to the ground and bend your knees to cushion the landing.

Although you need to be familiar with how to set up and use escape ladders, do not practice escaping from second-floor windows.

Although you may very well have to get out through a second- or even third- floor window in case of a real fire you should not risk serious injury from a fall just for practice's sake.



Assess Your Results.

► RECORD YOUR FAMILY'S PERFORMANCE ON FIRE DRILLS.

Include in your data the amount of time it took for everyone to get to the designated outside meeting place, whether everyone followed proper procedures, what could be done better and any barriers to a quick escape.



► CORRECT PROBLEM AREAS.

Fire drills, especially the first and second ones, will most likely show problem areas that call for improvement. Was someone in a part of the house where he or she couldn't hear the alarm? Could a door or window not be opened? Was a potential escape route blocked? Fix anything that caused a problem during the fire drill immediately, because every second counts when you are trying to escape a fire.

► STICK WITH IT.

Don't just hold one or two drills and be satisfied if they go well. Holding regular drills will keep the proper escape procedure in the front of everyone's mind and better prepare your family for an actual fire.

Escape Considerations for Mature Adults & the Disabled

Many mature adults and disabled persons live with their families. Because these people's strength and mobility can be limited, they may not be able to save themselves like others in the house can. Their safety therefore needs special consideration in your fire-escape plan.

- **Mature adults and disabled family members should have unimpeded access to escape routes.** Doors should be easy for them to open and close, and openings should be wide enough to accommodate any assistive equipment they use, such as wheelchairs and walkers.
- **If possible, mature adults' and disabled individuals' bedrooms should be located on the first floor of the home, close to exits.** If not, make sure they are able to get downstairs quickly and safely. Emergency wheelchairs built especially for use on stairs are commercially available.
- **Practice helping mature adults and the disabled safely escape in the event of smoke filling the house.** If they are unable to get down on the floor and crawl to safety, they can be dragged along the floor while lying on a blanket. Even heavy persons can be transported relatively easily along smooth floors in this manner.



STEPS FOR SURVIVAL

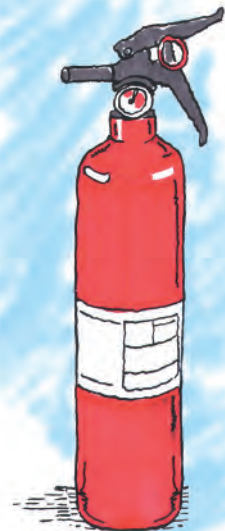
MAKE SURE YOU AND EVERYONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD ARE AWARE OF THESE BASIC FIRE-SAFETY RULES:

1 • **Check doors for heat.** Using the back of your hand, check the doorknob, surface of the door, around the crack of the door and under it for heat before opening it. If a door is cool, open it slowly; if it is warm or hot, keep the door closed and use the other exit.

• **Don't go looking for fire.** You could end up trapped by approaching smoke and flames. **2**

• **Fight the fire only if:** **3**

- ▶ Everyone has left or is leaving the house.
- ▶ The fire is small and confined to the immediate area in which it started.
- ▶ You can fight it with your back to a clear escape route.
- ▶ Your extinguisher is rated for the kind of fire you are fighting, it is in proper working order and you know exactly how to use it.



- Whenever you use a fire extinguisher, remember the **PASS** technique:

P

ull the safety pin at the top of the extinguisher.

A

im the nozzle at the base of the flames from six to eight feet away.

S

queeze the handle.

S

weep the stream from side to side until the fire is completely out.



4

- **Crawl low in smoke.** The only breathable air in a house that has smoke in it is one to two feet above the floor; this space also offers much greater visibility. If possible, hold a damp cloth over your mouth to minimize breathing poisonous gases, and take short breaths.

STOP DROP AND ROLL

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- **Remember “stop, drop and roll.”** If your clothes catch fire, stop, immediately drop to the floor and roll to put out the flames.

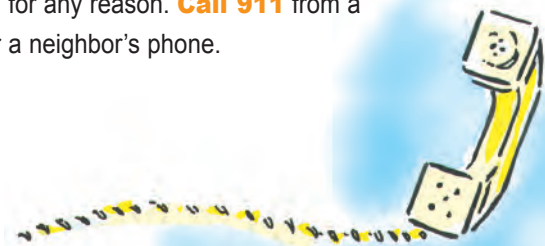
- **Never use elevators.** In a fire, always use stairs to get to lower floors. Many elevators are programmed to go to the floor where the fire started.

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- **Once everyone is out of the house, stay out.**

Do not go back in for any reason. **Call 911** from a portable phone or a neighbor's phone.



FIRST AID

House fires produce hot, extremely toxic gas. Many more people die of smoke inhalation than burns. If someone does inhale smoke, get him or her fresh air, and call for medical attention immediately. Perform artificial respiration on an unconscious person until professional help arrives. Treat any burns with cool water, not ice, butter or ointment. If the person is burned, it is important to watch out for shock, which is the slowing of circulation and other vital functions. If someone shows signs of shock (pale skin, shallow breathing, rapid but weak pulse, nausea), have the person lie down, elevate the feet, and cover him or her with a blanket to conserve body heat. Call for medical attention immediately.



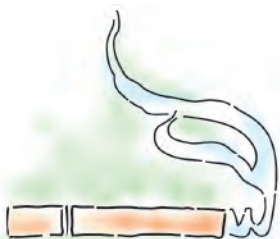
FIRE PREVENTION TIPS

A fire-escape plan is something everyone needs, but no one ever wants to have to use. If there is anything more important than a fire-escape plan, it's a fire-prevention plan. Keep the following in mind:

- 1 • Keep toddlers away from matches, lighters, flammable liquids and space heaters, and never leave young children unattended in the kitchen.
- 2 • Do not cook in loose clothing, especially clothing with loose sleeves that hang down. If a cooking fire starts, smother the flames with a lid. Never put water on grease fires.
- 3 • Do not use flammable liquids and aerosols (cleaners, nail polish removers, hairspray, etc.) near heat sources such as stoves and space heaters, or while smoking.
- 4 • Keep papers, clothes and curtains at least three feet away from space heaters. Make sure space heaters are Underwriters' Laboratory (UL)-approved.

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- Smoking is a leading cause of fatal fires. Do not smoke while you are drowsy. Also, if you host a party and one or some of your guests smoke, make sure before you go to bed that no one has dropped a cigarette butt into any furniture, where it can smolder for hours and eventually ignite.



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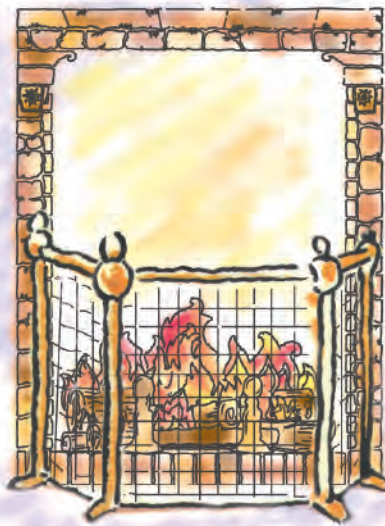
- To avoid electrical fires, do not overload outlets, and routinely check electrical devices, especially older ones, for frayed or otherwise damaged cords.

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- If you have a wood-burning fireplace, have the chimney checked and cleaned yearly to prevent creosote buildup. Always put a screen in front of fireplaces to stop flying sparks.

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- Store flammable liquids in approved containers in a well-ventilated place. If you store gasoline, it should be stored in an unattached shed or garage.



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