



Plan and Practice your Escape from a Fire

The Safety Director encourages everyone to plan how they would escape their homes, workplaces, and public places they visit, such as hotels and restaurants. Research shows that people do not truly panic in a fire situation. They make poor decisions because they never thought about it. The habit of developing situational awareness and plan for escape can have a life-saving impact for you, your family, and your friends.

At Work

Fires in workplaces are rare, and large fires are even rarer. In workplaces, employees and visitors are awake and alert, which leads to early detection and response to a fire starting. That is good news. The challenge is, since fires are rare, employees may not know the employer's plans for a fire or a fire notification. This speaks to the employer's need to not only have an Emergency Action Plan as required by PEOSH, but to make sure employees know the Plan and have practiced the Plan. Key points to cover during training include:

- The fire detection and alarm system – Does the system include heat and/or smoke detectors? Is the system activation automatically transmitted to a monitoring agency, such as ADT or local police, or will an occupant need to call 9-1-1 to report the alarm?
- If there is not a fire alarm system, how should a fire be reported and occupants notified?
- Primary and secondary escape routes should be pointed out from the various locations in the department
- Where are the primary and secondary assembly points?
- The importance of promptly reporting to the assembly point and getting counted
- The importance of assisting special needs employees, visitors, and contractors in the process.

At Home

Even more importantly, everyone should discuss with their family what a home escape plan entails and the value of practicing it. These discussions are more important than ever, mainly because today's homes burn faster than ever. The synthetic fibers used in modern home furnishings, along with the fact that newer homes tend to be built with more open spaces and unprotected lightweight construction, are contributing factors to the increased burn rate. Older homes may include larger dimensional lumber but have the hazards of older wiring that may be incompatible with today's appliances, or multiple renovations that may have created void spaces or holes in fire partitions.

“People tend to underestimate their risk to fire, particularly at home. That over-confidence lends itself to a complacency toward home escape planning and practice,” said Lorraine Carli, vice president of Outreach and Advocacy at National Fire Protection Association. “But in a fire situation, we’ve seen time and again that advance planning can make a potentially life-saving difference.”



Your home escape plan should include:

- Two ways out of every room, usually doors and windows.
- A designated outside meeting place (like a tree, light pole or mailbox) that's a safe distance from the home.
- They should call 9-1-1 from the meeting place. They should not delay their evacuation while they call from inside the home.

Homes with young children should practice their escape plans twice a year.

All homes must have working smoke alarms on every level of the house, and in or near every bedroom. Test your smoke detectors monthly. Remember to change the batteries in your detectors when you change your clocks unless you have a newer model with a sealed long-life battery.

The sensors of a smoke detector have a life expectancy usually of 7 to 10 years. If you can't recall when you last changed the detectors, change them now. Use a marker and date the new detectors as a reminder to change them again.

Homes should also have at least two ABC fire extinguishers rated with a minimum rating of 2A: 10BC. One fire extinguisher should be located immediately outside the kitchen, but not immediately next to the stove. A fire on the stove can make the extinguisher inaccessible if it is too close. Garages are the second-most common areas for fires. A second fire extinguisher should be strategically located here.

Check the date on the extinguisher. If it is older than 10 years, replace it this weekend.

Away From the Home

Planning should include places you visit, such as restaurants, hotels, concert venues, libraries, and other public places. Having a sense of situational awareness is even more important when you are out of your home and not at work because these locations are less familiar. Teach your family how to be aware of their surroundings.

Several of the most deadly fires in U.S. history have occurred in restaurants. When you and your family are seated, point out to everyone the two nearest exits from your table. Look for choke points along the routes such as overcrowded tables. And trust your instincts. Leave at the first sign of a fire. Many of the deaths were the result of smoke inhalation, from delaying their evacuation.

There is a great temptation for owners / operators of public venues to allow more patrons than permitted by the fire codes. If the restaurant or other venue looks overcrowded, consider your options.

When traveling, after checking into your hotel room, count doors to the left and right of your room to the nearest two stairwells. Do not use the elevators in the event of a fire.

Be a hero. Plan and practice your escape from a fire, for a greater sense of fire awareness in your home and workplace.
