

Fire Drills in the Home

A guide for preparing a home exit drill.

A fire can get out of control in seconds, can double in size every minute, and can overcome an entire home in just five minutes. There's no time for planning during a fire emergency. Take time today and make a plan for escaping a fire. If fire occurs in your home, your primary goal should be to get out as quickly as possible.

1 Install Smoke Alarms – Smoke alarms are your best early warning system in the event of fire. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement and in each sleeping area.

2 Be prepared, plan your escape.

- Plan your escape from fire – Draw a floor-plan of your home, draw two ways out of every room. Discuss the escape routes with every member of your home.
- To slow the fire's spread, close all doors behind you as you exit.
- Agree on a meeting place outside the home where everyone can gather after escaping a fire to wait for the fire department. This gives you a chance to count heads and inform the fire department if anyone is missing or trapped inside.
- If there are infants, older adults or family members with mobility limitations make sure that someone is assigned to assist them in the fire drill and in the event of an emergency. Assign a backup person too, in case the designee is not home during the emergency.
- Know the emergency phone number to call after you escape. Call from a neighbor's home or a cellular phone once safely outside.
- If someone is missing, inform the fire department dispatcher when you call. Firefighters have the skills and equipment to perform rescues.
- Be sure your street number is clearly visible from the road. If not, paint it on the curb or install house numbers to ensure that responding emergency personnel can find your home.

3 Practice -- Practice your plan at least once a year.

- A home fire drill can be fun. Pick a person to be in charge
- Sound the smoke alarm to be sure everyone knows what the alarm sounds like.
- Make sure everyone participates.
- When you hold your fire drill, everyone in the family should practice crawling on their hands and knees low under smoke, one to two feet above the ground where the air is cooler and cleaner.
- Remind everyone to close all doors behind them as they exit.
- Follow your escape plan and go directly to your meeting place.
- Pretend that some ways are blocked and use the second way out.
- Get out quickly, but carefully!
- Once you are out, stay out!

Reference: National Fire Protection Association at www.nfpa.org; U.S. Fire Administration at www.usfa.fema.gov; Washington Public Fire Educators Position Statement on Home Fire Escape Planning and Exit Drills