



# Home Fire Safety

A Factsheet on keeping your home safe from fire.

Every 15 seconds a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the United States. Most fires don't happen in homes. But most fire deaths and injuries do. The major causes of fatal home fires are misplaced smoking materials, heating equipment, arson and children playing with matches or lighters. The United States and Canada have the highest fire death rates of any industrialized countries. Why? Our buildings are built to high standards and our fire departments are among the best in the world. The problem is people, and their lack of awareness about the importance of making fire safety a part of their everyday lives.

## How long do you have to escape from a fire in your home?

When people were asked this question in a recent survey, they answered in ways that were surprising. Fifty eight percent said two minutes or more. Twenty four percent estimated they had more than 10 minutes to escape a home fire.

The truth is, you may have much less time to escape than you think. A typical living room fire can threaten the entire house in just moments—producing life threatening conditions in nearby bedrooms less than two minutes after the smoke alarm sounds. Your family needs to know how to get out at the first sign of a home fire.

## Don't wait, plan your escape today

Every family should have a fire escape plan. Include everyone in the planning process. Draw your plan, marking two ways out of every room. Include windows. Pick a meeting place outside, well away from the building. Tell everyone to meet there after they've

escaped. That way you can count heads and tell the fire department if anyone's trapped inside. Don't forget to call the fire department from a safe location.

## Practice your plan

Plans are great, but the only way to know if they work is to practice them. Hold a home fire drill. Getting out of your own home sounds easy, but your home can look very different if it's full of smoke. Children in particular need to practice. Children practice drills at school every month, but rarely at home. But fires are far more likely to happen at home. Have someone press the button on the smoke alarm as the signal for the drill to start. Get out quickly, but carefully. Everyone should go to the meeting place.

## FIRE DRILL CHECKLIST

- ✓ The escape plan has been discussed with all family members.
- ✓ Start the drill with everyone in their room, pretending to be asleep.
- ✓ Signal the start of the drill by sounding the smoke alarm. It is especially important for children to recognize the sound of the

smoke alarm so they will react appropriately when they hear it.

- ✓ Practice using your main escape routes first. Don't run. Just go quickly and calmly outside and to the meeting place.
- ✓ The family meeting place is located safely away from the building and out of the way of the arriving fire department.
- ✓ Everyone arrives at the family meeting place in under two minutes.
- ✓ Someone pretends to go call 911 for help. They know what information to give the 911 dispatcher.

## Tips for a safe escape

1. If you see smoke, try another way out. If you can't avoid the smoke, crawl under it on your hands and knees.
2. Test doors before you open them. If you touch the door and it is warm, use another escape route. If the door is cool, open it cautiously.
3. Do security bars on windows have quick-release devices? Bars need to be opened easily and quickly from the inside by everyone in the household. Make sure to practice opening them.

4. Don't stop or go back for anything. Possessions can be replaced. You can't. Remember fire spreads quickly. Get out fast and stay out. Call the fire department as quickly as possible.

## Smoke Alarms Save Lives

### Count your smoke alarms

The Benton County Fire District #1 recommends you install at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home, including one in every bedroom.

### Check your smoke alarms

Press the test button on smoke alarms each month to make certain they are still working.

### Vacuum your smoke alarms

Clean smoke alarms each month of dust and cobwebs to keep them sensitive.

### Change your batteries

Change smoke alarm batteries at least once a year, or as soon as the alarm "chirps" warning that the battery is low. Benton County Fire District #1 suggests changing batteries in the fall when clocks are changed from Daylight Savings Time.

### Change your alarm

Replace smoke alarms once every ten years.

### Know the sound

Make sure everyone in the home can hear and recognize the sound of the smoke alarm and knows how to react immediately. Assistive devices are available for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## Escape Ladders

Bedrooms above the ground floor may need a fire escape ladder. One of the most important features of a home fire escape ladder is the presence of standoffs. These are protrusions that hold the ladder rungs away from the side of

the house. Standoffs help steady the ladder and allow enough room for a secure toehold. The more standoffs on a ladder the better. Home escape ladders come in two standard lengths—15 feet and 25 feet. The shorter length is adequate for most two story bedrooms, while the longer is used for three story rooms. Make sure that the ladder is easily deployed by the person who will use it. Also check for the load limit. Ladders should be rated for at least 1,000 pounds.

### Where to get them

Local hardware and home improvement stores carry escape ladders. Check by calling around to see who is currently carrying them. Another source are safety supply stores. Look for them in the yellow pages under safety equipment.

### How to use them

Portable ladders work somewhat like a boat ladder. They are generally made from aluminum or plastic chain with rigid bars as the rungs of the ladder. After purchasing a ladder, make sure that it fits the specific window for which it's intended. If the ladder is for a child's room, have the child practice putting the ladder out the window. Then have them practice climbing out, but do this from a first floor window. Do this as part of a family fire drill.

## Home Fire Safety Checklist Heating

■ Baseboard heaters do not touch any furniture or curtains, or other items stored on the floor.

■ You have your chimneys and heating systems inspected,

cleaned and repaired prior to the heating season.

■ All portable heaters are placed at least three feet from bedding, furniture, and other flammable materials.

■ Every fireplace is equipped with a sturdy metal screen.

## Electrical

■ You use as few extension cords and plug adapters as possible.

■ Extension cords used are not tacked to walls, run under rugs, or through doorways.

■ Small appliances, like the toaster, are unplugged when not in use.

## Housekeeping

■ Matches and lighters are kept out of the reach of children in a secure place.

■ Paint, varnish, and other flammables are stored in sturdy metal containers and in a cool place.

■ Ashes from fireplaces and barbecues are only disposed of in metal containers.

■ Candles are only lit when someone is able to keep an eye on them, and placed in sturdy holders away from things that can burn.

## Kitchen

■ The stove and oven are kept clean of grease.

■ In the event of a grease fire, you know that the best thing to do is to put a lid on it.

■ Cooking is never left unattended.

■ The oven is never used to heat the home.

## Smoking

■ Matches, lighters, and smoking materials are kept out of the reach of small children.

■ "No Smoking In Bed" is a house rule.

## Smoke Alarms

■ Smoke alarms are installed on a ceiling or high on the wall outside of the bedrooms) on each level of the home.

■ Smoke alarm batteries are changed once a year.

■ Smoke alarms are tested and cleaned regularly.

### Escape Plan

■ You have a plan of escape showing two ways out of every room in your home, especially bedrooms.

■ You regularly practice your escape plan by holding fire drills in your home.

■ Windows used for escaping can be opened easily.

■ Your house numbers are clearly visible from the street.

Items that you did not mark may put you at a higher risk from fire.

Take steps to make sure you are as fire safe as possible.

## FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Properly operated, fire extinguishers can help stop a small fire before it has a chance to grow out of control. Home fire extinguishers can be purchased from a hardware or home improvement store. A multipurpose, ABC dry chemical extinguisher is the recommended model.

### Remember the

### P.A.S.S. word

There are four basic steps to using a fire extinguisher.

**Pull** the safety pin by grabbing the ring and twisting.

**Aim** the hose at the base of the fire.

**Squeeze** the handle.

**Sweep** the hose from side to side while discharging and **Get Out!**

If the fire gets bigger, close the door to slow the spread of heat and smoke and evacuate.

### Be prepared

Training and practice are the best ways to prepare for emergencies. Make certain you know the P.A.S.S. system and understand how to safely use a fire extinguisher before the need ever arises.

■ Don't force yourself to fight a fire that makes you uncomfortable or puts you at risk.

■ Always let someone know and make certain 911 has been called before using an extinguisher on a fire.

■ Fire extinguishers are small quick fixes. If you are unable to put out the fire with one extinguisher, leave and close the door behind you.

■ Don't let the fire come between you and your exit. Keep your back to the exit and the fire on front of you.

### For More Information

#### Contact:

**Benton County Fire District #1**

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