



# Get Out Safely!

## A Factsheet on Fire Escape Planning

**M**ore than 4,000 Americans die each year in fires, and 20,000 are injured. Deaths resulting from failed emergency escapes are particularly avoidable. The U. S. Fire Administration (USFA), a part of the U. S. Department of Homeland Security, believes that having a sound escape plan will greatly reduce fire deaths and protect you and your family's safety if a fire occurs.

### HAVE A SOUND FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

In the event of a fire, remember - time is the biggest enemy and every second counts! Escape plans help you get out of your home quickly. In less than 30 seconds a small flame can get completely out of control and turn into a major fire. It only takes minutes for a house to fill with thick black smoke and become engulfed in flames.

### SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### PRACTICE ESCAPING FROM EVERY ROOM IN THE HOME

Practice escape plans every month. The best plans have two ways to get out of each room. If the primary way is blocked by fire or smoke, you will need a second way out. A secondary route might be a window onto an adjacent roof or using an Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) approved collapsible ladder for escape from upper story windows. Make sure that windows are not stuck, screens can be taken out quickly and that security bars can be properly opened. Also, practice feeling your way out of the house in the dark or with your eyes closed.

#### SECURITY BARS REQUIRE SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS

Security bars may help to keep your family safe from intruders, but they can also trap you in a deadly fire! Windows and doors with security

bars must have quick release devices to allow them to be opened immediately in an emergency. Make sure everyone in the family understands and practices how to properly operate and open locked or barred doors and windows.

#### IMMEDIATELY LEAVE THE HOME

When a fire occurs, do not waste any time saving property. Take the safest exit route, but if you must escape through smoke, remember to crawl low, under the smoke and keep your mouth covered. The smoke contains toxic gases which can disorient you or, at worst, overcome you.

#### NEVER OPEN DOORS THAT ARE HOT TO THE TOUCH

When you come to a closed door, use the back of your hand to feel the top of the door, the doorknob, and the crack between the door and door frame to make sure that fire is not on the other side. If it feels hot, use your secondary escape route. Even if the door feels cool, open it carefully. Brace your shoulder against the door and open it slowly. If heat and smoke come in, slam the door and make sure it is securely closed, then use your alternate escape route.

#### DESIGNATE A MEETING PLACE OUTSIDE AND TAKE ATTENDANCE

Designate a meeting location away from the home, but not necessarily across the street. For example, meet

under a specific tree or at the end of the driveway or front sidewalk to make sure everyone has gotten out safely and no one will be hurt looking for someone who is already safe. Designate one person to go to a neighbor's home to phone the fire department.

#### ONCE OUT, STAY OUT

Remember to escape first, then notify the fire department using the 911 system or proper local emergency number in your area. Never go back into a burning building for any reason. Teach children not to hide from firefighters. If someone is missing, tell the firefighters. They are equipped to perform rescues safely.

Finally, having working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home dramatically increases your chances of survival. Smoke alarm batteries need to be tested every month and changed with new ones at least once a year. Also, consider replacing the entire smoke alarm every ten years, or as the manufacturer guidelines recommend.

#### For more information contact:

The U. S. Fire Administration  
16825 South Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727  
or  
Visit the USFA Web site:  
[www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov)



**Homeland Security**



# This Is Fire!

A Factsheet on the Nature of Fire

**E**very day Americans experience the horror of fire. But most people don't understand fire. Only when we know the true nature of fire can we prepare ourselves and our families. Each year more than 4,000 Americans die and 20,000 are injured in fires, many of which could be prevented.

The U. S. Fire Administration (USFA), a part of the U. S. Department of Homeland Security, believes that fire deaths can be reduced by teaching people the basic facts about fire. Below are some simple facts that explain the particular characteristics of fire.

## Fire is **FAST!**

### THERE IS LITTLE TIME!

In less than 30 seconds a small flame can get completely out of control and turn into a major fire. It only takes minutes for thick black smoke to fill a house. In minutes, a house can be engulfed in flames. Most fires occur in the home when people are asleep. If you wake up to a fire, you won't have time to grab valuables because fire spreads too quickly and the smoke is too thick. There is only time to escape.



## Fire is **HOT!**

### HEAT IS MORE THREATENING THAN FLAMES.

A fire's heat alone can kill. Room temperatures in a fire can be 100 degrees at floor level and rise to 600 degrees at eye level. Inhaling this super hot air will scorch your lungs. This heat can melt clothes to your skin. In

five minutes a room can get so hot that everything in it ignites at once: this is called flashover.

## Fire is **DARK!**

### FIRE ISN'T BRIGHT, IT'S PITCH BLACK.

Fire starts bright, but quickly produces black smoke and complete darkness. If you wake up to a fire you may be blinded, disoriented and unable to find your way around the home you've lived in for years.

## Fire is **DEADLY!**

### SMOKE AND TOXIC GASES KILL MORE PEOPLE THAN FLAMES DO.

Fire uses up the oxygen you need and produces smoke and poisonous gases that kill. Breathing even small amounts of smoke and toxic gases can make you drowsy, disoriented and short of breath. The odorless, colorless fumes can lull you into a deep sleep before the flames reach your door. You may not wake up in time to escape.



## Fire Safety Tips

### IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE, REMEMBER TIME IS THE BIGGEST ENEMY AND EVERY SECOND COUNTS!

Escape first, then call for help. Develop a home fire escape plan and designate a meeting place outside. Make sure everyone in the family knows two ways to escape from every room. Practice feeling your way out with your eyes closed. Never stand up in a fire, always crawl low under the smoke and try to keep your mouth covered. Never return to a burning building for any reason; it may cost you your life.

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.

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# Exposing an Invisible Killer

A Factsheet on the Dangers of Carbon Monoxide

**E**ach year in America, unintentional carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning claims more than 500 lives and sends another 15,200 people to hospital emergency rooms for treatment.<sup>1</sup>

The U. S. Fire Administration (USFA) and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) would like you to know that there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself from deadly carbon monoxide fumes.

## UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

### WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. At lower levels of exposure, CO causes mild effects that are often mistaken for the flu. These symptoms include headaches, dizziness, disorientation, nausea and fatigue. The effects of CO exposure can vary greatly from person to person depending on age, overall health and the concentration and length of exposure.

### WHERE DOES CARBON MONOXIDE COME FROM?

CO gas can come from several sources: gas-fired appliances, charcoal grills, wood-burning furnaces or fireplaces and motor vehicles.

### WHO IS AT RISK?

Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning. Medical experts believe that unborn babies, infants, children, senior citizens and people with heart or lung problems are at even greater risk for CO poisoning.

### WHAT ACTIONS DO I TAKE IF MY CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM GOES OFF?

What you need to do if your carbon monoxide alarm goes off depends on whether anyone is feeling ill or not.

#### IF NO ONE IS FEELING ILL:

1. Silence the alarm.
2. Turn off all appliances and sources of combustion (i.e. furnace and fireplace).
3. Ventilate the house with fresh air by opening doors and windows.
4. Call a qualified professional to investigate the source of the possible CO buildup.

#### IF ILLNESS IS A FACTOR:

1. Evacuate all occupants immediately.
2. Determine how many occupants are ill and determine their symptoms.
3. Call your local emergency number and when relaying information to the dispatcher, include the number of people feeling ill.
4. Do not re-enter the home without the approval of a fire department representative.
5. Call a qualified professional to repair the source of the CO.

### PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM CO POISONING

- Install at least one UL (Underwriters Laboratories) listed carbon monoxide alarm with an audible warning signal near the sleeping areas and outside individual bedrooms. Carbon monoxide alarms measure levels of CO over time and are designed to sound an alarm before an average, healthy

adult would experience symptoms. It is very possible that you may not be experiencing symptoms when you hear the alarm. This does not mean that CO is not present.

- Have a qualified professional check all fuel burning appliances, furnaces, venting and chimney systems at least once a year.
- Never use your range or oven to help heat your home and never use a charcoal grill or hibachi in your home or garage.
- Never keep a car running in a garage. Even if the garage doors are open, normal circulation will not provide enough fresh air to reliably prevent a dangerous buildup of CO.
- When purchasing an existing home, have a qualified technician evaluate the integrity of the heating and cooking systems, as well as the sealed spaces between the garage and house. The presence of a carbon monoxide alarm in your home can save your life in the event of CO buildup.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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