

Fire Escape Plans

Fire is the number 1 household killer in America, and it's essential to have a working fire extinguisher, smoke detectors, and a well-rehearsed route out of your house in the event of fire.

Here's our 12-point fire escape plan checklist:

1. Make sure you formulate both a main and an alternate route. This will help avoid panic if your primary path is too dangerous to follow.
2. Create a simple, efficient route. The idea is to get out of the house as quickly as possible. Don't make provisions for stopping to grab important possessions or papers. Your family is the most important thing. Call the fire department from a neighbor's house, instead of wasting precious escape time placing a call during a fire.
3. Practice fire drills with both your family and any babysitters or relatives who regularly care for your baby.
4. If you live in a house that has two or more stories, buy a portable escape ladder that can be lowered out a designated window. Make sure everyone knows where it is and how it works.
5. If you live in an apartment building, don't make elevators part of your plan because they can easily malfunction or get trapped between floors.
6. Have a designated meeting place — a safe spot outside the house where everyone can gather and be accounted for.
7. Remember that smoke and poisonous gas, not flames, are the leading cause of fire-related deaths. To avoid inhaling deadly fumes, crawl low to the ground and securely carry your baby under you with one arm to offer protection.
8. Stop, drop, and roll if your clothing or hair catches on fire. You learned the rule in first grade and it really works, so teach it to your toddlers. If your baby's clothing is on fire, wrap him quickly in a blanket to put the flames out.
9. In an actual fire, test door handles with your fingertips before grasping them firmly. If they're hot, use an alternate route. Windows are excellent exits on first floors and can be used on upper floors to gain temporary refuge on roofs and porches until help arrives.
10. Call your local fire department or volunteer rescue squad to schedule an in-home visit. Most communities offer fire-prevention training as a free service to residents or members. Firefighters can offer suggestions on creating the safest route possible in your home, while also checking your smoke alarms and fire extinguishers, and pointing out any potential fire hazards you hadn't recognized.
11. Teach your children that if trapped in their room they should lie on the floor close to their bed. That is the first place firefighters will look for them.
12. If hallways and exit routes are filled with smoke, get down and crawl. Smoke rises, so the air will be a bit cleaner closer to the floor.