

Fire escape plans need to be practiced

By Lynne Tolmachoff

Did you know that only one-third of Americans have created and practiced a home fire escape plan? Almost three-quarters of Americans have an escape plan; however, less than half ever practice it?

With these statistics, it's time to stop being complacent and get the ball rolling in creating a home escape plan for you and your family and more importantly practicing it.

The second week in October (8-14) marks Fire Prevention Week and this year's theme is Every Second Counts – Plan 2 Ways Out! Take time now to create an escape plan with your family and practice that plan twice a year. Knowing what to do and where to go can save precious seconds, helping you and your family escape safely without tragedy.

Our goal is to make sure our residents are safe from fires, whether inside the home or outside. Fire Prevention Week is one opportunity to initiate awareness of how to protect you and your family from harm's way and to give you the tools you need to maintain a safe home and yard.

Fire Prevention Week has been observed on the Sunday through Saturday period in which Oct. 9 falls, in commemoration of the Great Chicago Fire, which began Oct. 8, 1871. The horrific fire killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres. Each year's theme is to reinforce the importance of fire prevention.

Crafting your plan for escaping a home fire is easy to do:

- Draw a map of your home. With all the members of your household, visit each room and identify two ways out.
- Show all doors and windows on your drawing and mark the path to the outside from each exit.
- Practice your plan during the day and at night to ensure that you and your family can get out safely at any time.
- Make sure to teach your children how to escape on their own, in case you can't help them.
- Have a plan for the elderly as it may take more time to get them out safely.
- Let everyone know to close the doors behind you as you leave – this may slow the spread of smoke, heat, and fire.
- Once you get outside, stay outside. Never go back inside for anything.
- Call 911 from outside and make sure your address is easy to see from the road.

If you happen to be caught in a wildfire, knowing two ways out is critical to getting out safely. **Create a wildfire evacuation Plan that includes:**

- A designated emergency meeting location outside the fire or hazard area. This is essential to determine who has safely evacuated from the affected area.
- Several escape routes from your home and community. Practice these often so everyone in your family is familiar in case of emergency.
- Have an evacuation plan for pets and large animals such as horses and other livestock.
- Designate an out-of-area friend or relative as a point of contact to act as a single source of communication among family members in case of separation (cell and internet systems can be overloaded or limited during a disaster).

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