

Fire Escape Planning for Older Adults

Knowing what to do in the event of a fire is particularly important for older adults. Beginning at age 65, people are twice as likely to be killed or injured by fires compared to the population at large. With the number of seniors growing every year—it's essential that they take the necessary steps to stay safe.

The Alberta Emergency Management Agency offers the following guidelines to increase fire safety for older adults:

Keep it low - If you don't live in an apartment building, consider sleeping in a room on the ground floor to make emergency escape easier. Make sure that smoke alarms are installed near any sleeping area and have a telephone installed where you sleep in case of emergency.

Test the alarm – It is important to know that your smoke alarm will work in the event of a fire emergency. Test smoke alarms monthly. Some smoke alarms are equipped with large, easy to push test buttons. Additionally, alarms that can be tested using a flashlight or television remote are particularly helpful for people with mobility challenges, people who are blind or have low vision, or for older adults.

Notice the alarm - The majority of fatal fires occur when people are sleeping. Because smoke can put you into a deeper sleep, it's important to have a mechanical early warning of a fire to wake you up. If anyone in your household is deaf or if your own hearing is diminished, consider installing a smoke alarm that uses a flashing light, vibration and/or higher decibel sound to alert you to a fire emergency.

Do the drill - Conduct your own fire drill or participate in regular fire drills to make sure you know what to do in the event of a home fire. If you or someone you live with cannot escape alone, designate a member of the household to assist and decide on back ups in case the designated helper isn't home. Fire drills are also a good opportunity to make sure that everyone is able to hear and respond to smoke alarms.

Open up - Make sure that you are able to open all doors and windows in your home. Locks and pins should open easily from inside. If you have security bars on doors or windows, they should have quick-release mechanisms inside so that they can be opened easily. These mechanisms won't compromise your security, but they will enable you to open the window from inside in the event of a fire. Check to be sure that windows haven't been sealed shut with paint or nails. If they have, arrange for someone to break the seals all around your home or remove the nails.

Stay connected - Keep a telephone nearby, along with emergency phone numbers so that you can communicate with emergency personnel if you're trapped in your room by fire or smoke.