

Home Fire Escape Planning

A fire can spread rapidly through your home, leaving you as little as three minutes to escape safely. Your ability to get out depends on advance warning from smoke alarms and advance planning – a home fire escape plan that everyone in your home is familiar with and has practiced. These tips can help you put together and practice an effective home fire escape plan.

Fire Facts

- Most fire deaths in Alberta happen in homes, especially at night when people are asleep. People, who die in home fires, often die from breathing the smoke and toxic gases from the fire—not from being burned by flames. These toxic gases can render a person confused and disoriented or even unconscious after only a few short breaths. The effects may overcome you long before you have time to orient yourself to get out of your own home. If you plan and practice your escape drill, you will know exactly what to do, almost automatically, to quickly and safely get out from a burning house.
- Once a fire starts it can spread rapidly. In as little as three minutes, a small fire can erupt into a “flashover” (when a room gets so hot everything suddenly bursts into flames). Three minutes isn’t a lot of time to notice the fire danger, round up your family, identify a safe escape route, and escape from your home. Seconds count in a fire emergency.

Safety Tips

Plan Your Escape

- Have at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home and test your alarm(s) monthly to make sure they are in working condition to warn you of a fire.
- Involve the whole household in drawing a simple floor plan of your home, marking exactly how to get out in a fire emergency.
- Identify two exits from **each** room, particularly bedrooms that you can use to escape. Planning two escape routes could save your life if one exit is blocked by smoke or fire.
- Establish a safe meeting place outside of the home.
- Assign a designated helper for any person living in your home who may not be able to escape the fire emergency on his or her own. This may include young children, older people, or people with impairments due to mobility limitations, disabilities, medications, or alcohol.
- Ensure your street number is clearly visible from the road so that responding emergency personnel can find your home.
- Inform guests and visitors about your home escape plan and find out about others escape plans when you stay overnight in their homes.

Practice Your Escape Plan

- Practice your home fire escape plan at least twice a year with everyone living in your home.
- Make the drill as realistic as possible. Sound the smoke alarm, and practice different scenarios and escape routes. Practice your escape using the escape tips identified below.
- Most fire emergencies happen at night. Ensure you practice at night while everyone is asleep.

For more information, please contact the Alberta Emergency Management Agency at (780) 422-9000 (dial 310-000 for toll-free access outside of Edmonton) or email: aema@gov.ab.ca

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How to Escape

- ❑ **Get low and go under smoke.** All household members should learn how to “get low and go” under the layer of smoke hanging under the ceiling during a fire emergency. In a fire, the air closer to the floor will be relatively free of toxic smoke and gases and will be easier to breathe.
- ❑ **Check the door with your hand.** If the door is hot, fire could already be burning through! That's when you'll use your alternate exit. If the door is cool it may be safe. Brace your shoulder against it, turn your face away and open it a crack to check. If there is any smoke or heat, slam the door shut and head for an alternate exit.
- ❑ **Make sure everyone knows how to open the windows in your home.** In most cases, a window will be your best alternate exit. If you have to smash it to get out - do it. Place a blanket or pillow on the windowsill to protect yourself from broken glass. If the bedroom windows are high above the ground, consider getting fire ladders, and practice so everyone knows how to use them.
- ❑ **Close doors behind you.** A closed door can hold back toxic smoke and flames in an emergency and could give you a few lifesaving seconds to escape.
- ❑ **Get out, stay out.** Decide on a meeting place outside so everyone can be accounted for. Designate one person to find a phone away from the home, and call the fire department. Do not go back inside the house until the fire department says it is okay to do so.
- ❑ **If you are trapped, protect yourself until help arrives.** If you can't leave the building because smoke or fire is blocking your exits, call the fire department to report your exact location and gather in a room with a window to await firefighters' arrival. Close all doors between you and the fire. Stuff air vents and cracks with duct tape, wet blankets, towels or clothing. Then, carefully open a window at the top or bottom, if possible, to let fresh air in. Don't break the window – if smoke enters the room from outside the building, you won't be able to protect yourself. Wave a flashlight or a light coloured cloth at the window to let the fire department know where you are.
- ❑ **Talk to your fire department.** Your local fire prevention officer can help you plan and practice your escape plan and help determine and overcome any limiting factors or challenges.

Apartment Dwellers

- Know your building's evacuation plan and participate in fire drills, which should be held at least once a year.
- Identify all available exits, including hallways and stairways. Windows in high-rise buildings are often not available as a source of escape.
- Never use the elevator in a fire emergency.
- If you can't leave the building due to smoke or fire blocking your exits, follow the guidelines outlined above for trapped occupants.

Older Adults and the Impaired

- Consider sleeping in a room on the ground floor level to make emergency escape quicker and easier.

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- Choose smoke alarms equipped with large test buttons, or ones that can be tested using a flashlight or television remote to make monthly testing of your smoke alarm easier.
- If any one in the home can't hear the smoke alarm, consider installing an alarm that uses a flashing light, vibration, or higher decibel sound to alert you to a fire emergency.
- Never use the elevator in a fire emergency.
- Incorporate special needs into the fire escape plan, such as assigning a designated helper.
- If you can't leave the building, follow the guidelines outlined above for trapped occupants.